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OR,
Clearing Up a Strange Case.

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AUTHOR OF "BROADWAY BILLY," "REDLIGHT RALPH,"
"BLUE-GRASS BURT," "KENTUCKY JEAN," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MISTAKE SOMEWHERE.

"SWEET pertaters! it 'most takes away my breath!
Who'd 'a' thunk it?—that I've got a thousand dol-
lars in that big bank, all in my own name, an' didn't
know it. Lordy! I feel like goin' over ter Bedbug's
Island an' shakin' hands with Mrs. Liberty! Won-
der if she'd shake?"

He it was, the same jolly boy, as large as life and
quite as natural; the same Broadway Billy whom
we, once before, have introduced to the readers of
of this delightful Library.*

"GOT A BOODLE! OH! GIT OUT!" "NARY A GIT, I'VE GOT A CLIP AN' CLEAN
THOUSAND DOLLARS IN THAT INSTITUTION."

* In Half-Dime No. 490.

Broadway Billy's Boodle.

He was standing on Broadway, his hands thrust deep into his trowsers pockets, his box hung over his shoulder, his cap set back upon his head, and was gazing up at the stately front of one of the great banks.

It was getting late in the afternoon, and was about time for the bank to close.

"It knocks me silly!" he presently exclaimed. "It's th' best joke I ever heard of. A thousand dollars, an' every penny of it mine! Great cats! couldn't I do th' swell act, though, if I was ter draw it out! I could turn Fifth avenue dizzy, an' make Inspector Br— Hello! Skinny, is that you?"

Another boy had just come up, who gave Billy a playful poke in the side.

It was his chum and partner-elect, who rejoiced in the appropriate nickname of "Skinny," owing to his remarkable thinness. He was indeed a thin boy; so thin, in fact, that Billy often declared that he couldn't cast a decent shadow.

"Guess it is, Billy," Skinny replied.

"Haven't joined th' fat men's club yet, have ye?"

"No, not yet. Say, though, what be ye standin' here for, a-gazin' up at that bank? Don't think of buyin' it, do ye?"

"No, not jest that, Skinny; but I've got th' best joke on that bank ye ever heard of."

"Got a joke on th' bank?"

"Sure!"

"What is th' joke?"

"Why, I've got a boodle in there."

"Got a boodle! Oh! git out!"

"Nary a git. I've got a clip an' clean thousand dollars in that instertution, my gay an' festive pard, an' it's all in my own name."

"Oh! come away! you're only kiddin'."

"Say, Skinny, did I ever lie to ye when th' truth would do jest as well?"

"No, can't say as ye ever did, Billy."

"Well, then, jest pin yer faith onto what I'm tellin' ye now."

"But, Billy, where in th' world could you git a thousand dollars?"

"Oh! I pick 'em where they grow."

"Ye might tell a feller, anyhow."

"Well, I will, Skinny, seein' as we're ter be future partners. Jest lend me yer ear fer a minute, or both of 'em if ye kin spare 'em, an' I'll tell ye all about it."

"All right; fire away."

"Well, ye remember that case I had last summer, don't ye?"

"What case? th' measles? Oh! yes, I—"

"Measles yer grandmother! No! I'm a-talkin' 'bout d-t-ctive work!"

"Oh! I see. You mean that case where ye brought that rich feller to bay an' blocked his little game; yes, I remember that."

"Well, it seems Mr. George Stidwell, an' th' rest of 'em, put a thousand dollars into this bank in my name, an' I didn't know a word about it. My mom knew it, though, an' she's been keepin' th' bank-book fer me. Yesterday she took sick awful sudden, an' sent Polly Osmond out ter find me, double quick. Polly found me, an' when I got home I guess mom thought she was goin' ter die. She called me to her, put th' book inter my hands, told me ter be a good boy, an' then shut her eyes."

"I tell ye what, Skinny. I thought she was a goner, sure, an' it made me feel awful chokey; but, she didn't go. Th' octor soon fetched her around all right, an' this mornin' she was as good as new. But, th' secret of th' bank-book an' th' thousand dollars ain't a secret no longer, and—Lordy! I feel like goin' right in an' shakin' hands with th' hull concern, from president to watchman."

"That is good news, Billy, an' no mistake. Now we kin buy out that corner stand, an'—"

"Not much!" Billy quickly exclaimed. "I mean ter be self-made, as I've told ye before. I'm goin' ter work my way, my gay an' festive skeleton friend, an' owe nothin' ter nobody. That's my platform, every time! This little thousand kin lay here an' sleep."

"Well, I don't know but ye're right, Billy, an'—"

"Right! of course I am! Say, though, ain't it a rich joke on mom? She felt as mean as mud when she found she wasn't goin' ter die. An' won't it open th' eyes of Inspector Br— Hello! this must be th' president of the concern, I guess."

Billy referred to an elderly gentleman who had just come out of the door of the bank and was descending the steps, putting on his gloves as he came down.

Instantly the boy stepped forward and accosted him.

"Say, mister," he inquired. "be you th' presidential figger-head of this 'stablishment?"

"I am the president of the bank, if that is what you mean," was the reply, as the gentleman paused and looked at the boy.

"That's what I was drivin' at," Billy declared.

"Ye see, mister, I've got a boodle in that bank—a clean thousand dollars, an' I want ter ask if she's solid."

"Solid as a rock, my lad," the jovial old gentleman answered, smiling. "But you are surely not in earnest in saying you have a thousand dollars in the bank, are you?"

"Ain't I, then! Well, now, I want ter impress it on your mind that I am. An' I've got th' book at home ter prove it."

"Then why do you not give up the boot-blacking trade?"

"Cause, jest as I told my pardner, Skinny, that shadder over there: I'm bound ter be self-made or nothin'. Ye see, sir, this thousand was given to me, an' I mean ter earn my start in life."

"Nobly spoken, my lad. You've got the right ring about you, and you're bound to rise."

"Thank ye, sir. An', I'm glad ter know your bank is solid. I won't have ter lay awake o' nights a-dreamin' about my boodle. Shine, sir?"

"Well, yes. I see you do not forget business in your hour of prosperity," and the gentleman placed his foot upon the boy's box.

"Lord bless ye, no!" Billy responded, as he set to work. "Why, business is meat an' bread ter me. Say, though, mister, what sort o' cashier have ye got? Does he have any appearance o' longin' ter become one o' th' Queen's subjects? D've ever see him studyin' railroad maps? Has he got any sort o' Canadian-fever sort o' expression in his off eye? If—"

The president laughed heartily.

"No, my boy" he answered, "our cashier is all right. He is a gentleman, and far above suspicion."

"Glad ter hear it. There's none of 'em ter be trusted though, sir, an' henceforth I'm goin' ter keep my watchful eye on this bank, an' don't ye forget it. H'ist yer hoof."

"What?"

"Beg pardon; I mean lift yer foot."

Mr. Jonas Herman was more amused than offended. He had encountered many specimens of the audacious street Arab, but this boy was the most amusing one he had ever met.

"What is your name, my lad?" he asked, as he changed feet on the boy's box.

"My name is William Weston, sir, but I'm a good deal better known as Broadway Billy. What's your name?"

"My name is Jonas Herman."

"Glad ter know ye, sir. Say, can't I make a contract with ye ter shine ye up every day? Terms easy an' satisfaction guaranteed. Biz is biz, ye know."

"Yes, my lad; be here at this hour every day, and I'll be one of your regular customers."

"All right! An' there's yer shine, sir, black as a crow's wing, an' as glossy as a dude's corkscrew trowsers."

With another smile, Mr. Herman gave the boy a dime, finished putting on his gloves, and went up the street.

"There, Skinny," Billy said, as he rejoined his companion, "that's th' way ter make th' acquaintance of th' upper ten an' talk business. What I lack in learnin' I make up in tongue, an' th' feller what kin wag his jaw th' be it is th' feller that's goin' ter git there."

"Don't know but you're right, Billy, but I couldn't 'a' had th' cheek ter ax that man his name like you did."

"Cheek! Why, bless yer soul, Skinny, ain't this a free-an'-equal country? an' didn't he ax my name first?"

"Yes; but then he's a gentleman, an'—"

"Well, hang your shadowy carcass! D've mean ter say I ain't one? Lordy! Skinny, if ye wasn't so frail I'd pulverize ye, sure!"

Skinny laughed, well-knowing that Billy was not in earnest.

"Yes, sir-ee! I'm as good as th' best of 'em!" Billy added. "Mebbe they wouldn't believe it, but it's a fact all th' same. Why, even Inspector Br— S'et per-taters!"

Billy stopped short with that exclamation, and his eyes, open to their widest, were suddenly fixed upon a young lady who was passing.

She was a beautiful girl, about seventeen years of age, and was dressed in the very acme of fashion.

Billy gazed at her in amazement for a moment, then stepped boldly forward, laid his hand gently but familiarly upon her arm, and said:

"Sweet pertaters, Polly, where are ye goin' all dressed up like this? Where did ye get th' togs? Lordy! you do cut a dizzy dash, an' no mistake! Where—"

"Remove your hand!" the girl cried, turning upon him with her black eyes flashing indignantly.

"Well, ye needn't be so mighty huffy about it, anyhow," Billy rejoined, as he removed his hand.

"Ye can't seem ter remember yer friends, now that ye've got fine duds on."

"I do not know you, you young ruffian! and if you say another word to me, I will call an officer."

"All right, all right," muttered Billy, as he backed away; "you may not know me, but I know you. Mebbe I didn't help ye sift ashes this mornin' out in front of our palatial Centre-street barrack."

"You insult me!" the girl cried hotly. "I never saw Centre street, much less you. You mistake the person." And with burning cheeks she tried to push out of the crowd that had quickly collected.

"All right," said Billy, "have it your own way. I know ye, though, an' I never had any idea ye'd go back on me like this. Hereafter ye kin lug yer own an' sift yer own ashes!"

A loud laugh went up from the crowd, the most of those present siding with Billy, who was so positive in what he said; and the young lady was placed in a most unenviable light.

There was evidently a huge mistake somewhere.

Suddenly a young man darted out of the bank, pushed his way through the crowd to the girl's side, lifted his hat, and said:

"Miss Elmore, what has happened? Can I be of any service to you?"

"Oh! Mr. Melvin!" the girl cried, "I am so glad you are here! I have been grossly insulted."

"By whom?" and her champion glared around fiercely.

"By that cowardly and ragged bootblack!" pointing straight at Billy.

With one bound the young man was at Billy's side, and then a quick blow from his fist sent Billy rolling into the gutter.

CHAPTER II.

MYSTERIOUS MOVEMENTS.

The moment Billy was down his little friend Skinny sprung to his assistance and helped him to his feet, when, catching sight of a policeman, they took to their heels and ran away.

The street boy knows that whether in the right or the wrong or whatever the mistake, he must not let a policeman get hold of him if he can help it.

And Skinny made good their escape. The young man who had sent Billy to the ground so suddenly and so ingloriously, now led the young lady out of the crowd and accompanied her up the street.

"Sweet pertaters!" Broadway Billy exclaimed, when he and Skinny were safe from pursuit and capture, "but that feller made me see stars. I wasn't lookin' fer a knock-down, an' he hit out 'fore I was ready. Lucky I had time ter dodge a little, or I'd got it right in th' eye. Now, Skinny, what d've make out of it?"

"It's jest what I've been expectin'," Skinny declared.

"Jest what ye've been expectin'! What d've mean by that?"

"Mean jest what I say. You have a way of makin' ye self too mighty fresh sometimes, an' it's 'bout time somebody took it out of ye."

"If you wasn't so thin, Skinny, I'd throttle ye right here an' now. Me too fresh! why, you're away off. Didn't I speak ter that girl in a 'spectable way?"

"What business had ye speakin' to her at all, though?"

"Why, I was sure I knew her, an' I ain't sure I don't yet. Say, ye've heard me speak o' Polly Osmond, a pretty girl that lives in th' same house me an' mom lives in on Centre street, ain't ye?"

"Yes, often."

"Well, if th' girl I spoke to ain't that same Polly, then it's her ghost. I don't believe there could be two persons look so much alike."

"An' that's why ye spoke to her, eh?"

"Of course. Why, Polly an' me is th' best o' chums, an' I'm sure I didn't mean no harm."

"I guess that thousan' dollar boodle has sort o' turned your brain, an' ye couldn't see straight. It ain't likely that two gals would look so much alike that you couldn't tell one from t'other."

"Now, Skinny, see here. I can't set myself right in th' eyes of all that crowd that seen me git downed, but I kin set myself right in yours, an' I'll do it. You come right along with me to my Centre-street wigwam."

"Oh! Billy, I can't! J—"

"Yes, you can, too, an' ye've got ter go! If we kin find Polly Osmond in th' house, you'll see how easy it was fer me ter be mistook in th' gal."

"Well, if you mean biz, Billy, I reckon I'll have ter go."

"That's what I do mean, an' I reckon ye will."

And the two set out.

Billy's home, as he has told us, was in a Centre street tenement-house. It consisted of three rooms, and was near the top of the building.

When he and his friend arrived there, Billy led the way up to his mother's rooms and they entered.

"Hello! mom, hard at work a-sewin', be ye? You'll be gettin' sick ag'in th' first ye know; there's no need o' your workin' so steady all th' time. Say, this is Mr. Skinny, my future pardner that ye've heard me speak of. I guess ye kin see him, if ye look sharp."

Skinny blushed, and Mrs. Weston welcomed him to her home.

"I ain't off duty yet, mom," Billy explained, "but me an' Skinny is here on biz. Say, have ye seen Polly this afternoon?"

"Yes, she left the room only a few minutes before you came in. She has been here with me two hours or more."

"Sweet pertaters! then it wasn't her, after all. An' I'm glad it wasn't. I didn't think she'd use me so mean. Say, call her up here, will ye? I want ter see her a minute."

"What are you talking about? What has been going on?" Mrs. Weston asked, with woman's natural curiosity.

Billy explained briefly, and then his mother stepped out into the hall and called down to Polly to come up.

In a few moments the door opened and a girl entered the room.

Instantly, then, Skinny realized how easy it had been for Billy to be mistaken. This girl was the very likeness of the one they had so recently seen on Broadway.

mornin', an' she got madder still. Then out rushed a dude out of a bank, hit me a clip before I was lookin' for it, an' spilled me all over th' sidewalk. Then me an' Skinny came away. Now, Polly, I want ter know who that other girl is."

"Why, I'm sure I don't know, Billy," the girl answered. "I never saw her, I am sure."

"Well, I saw her then, an' I mean ter see her ag'in, too. I'm goin' ter know jest who she is, an' all about her. Why, you two could make your fortunes as freaks in a dime museum."

"Thank you, but I don't aspire," said Polly; "nor would my double, I guess, from what you say of her. She was rich, you say?"

"Well, I should say so, if togs is anything to judge by."

"Then she can certainly be no relative of mine."

"No, I don't s'pose she is, Polly, but as I said before, I'm bound ter know who she is, or bu'st. An' as fer that dude that knocked me down— Well, I can't blame him any, under th' appearances o' th' circumstances, either; but he didn't look jest my ideal idee o' true blue, an' if I kin git a dig at him in a fair way, I sha'n't throw away th' chance, you bet!"

"I would pay no attention to the matter any further," Mrs. Weston advised. "You will only be running into danger and trouble."

"Give up th' case? Not fer Joseph! I'm never so happy as when I'm head over ears in detective work, an' I'm goin' inter this mystery with a whoop an' yell that will startle all Gotham an' cause Inspector Br— Come, though, Skinny, we must be goin'!"

Skinny was ready, and together they left the house and returned to Broadway.

Both were bootblacks, and both had several regular patrons to serve before five o'clock, so the moment they reached Broadway they parted company and attended to business.

In the mean time, barely had the two boys gone from the tenement-house when a closed carriage drew up and stopped before the building.

The driver got down, opened the door and assisted a closely-veiled lady to alight.

The woman went at once into the house, and the driver waited.

Meeting a woman in the hall, the stranger inquired where Mrs. Osmond's rooms were, and being told, passed on up-stairs and knocked at a door.

Mrs. Osmond herself opened it.

The strange woman passed quickly within, and the door was again closed and locked.

Mrs. Osmond was alone, Polly being still with Mrs. Weston on the floor above.

"Are we alone?" the visitor asked, with a great show of caution.

"Yes," Mrs. Osmond answered, "we are quite alone."

Being thus assured, the visitor lifted her veil.

She was a woman perhaps forty years of age, possibly good-looking, but possessed of an evil, or vengeful, expression of countenance that it was not pleasant to see.

"The girl?" she queried, briefly.

"She is well. She is just up-stairs in the apartments of a neighbor."

"I have come for her."

"You mean to take her away?"

"I do."

"But, Mrs. Bl—"

"Hist! not that name! Call me Mrs. Smith."

"But, Mrs. Smith, this is so sudden, I am hardly prepared to part with her. I have learned to love her to a certain degree, and I—"

"There—there, now, pray let us have no such sentimentality as this. This is purely a business matter. I engaged you at such a price to do a certain work. You have done your part and I have paid you. Here, now, is the final sum. Take it, and get the girl ready to accompany me at once."

With trembling hands Mrs. Osmond took the proffered money, saying:

"Yes, you are right. I agreed to do the work and must not hesitate now. I am sorry, though, that I did not abuse the girl a great deal more than I have, and bring myself to hate her. Then the parting would be easy. No one could hate Polly, though, she is so gentle, kind and goo—"

"There—there! no more of it."

"No, you are right. But, Mrs. Bl— I mean Mrs. Smith, suppose she will not agree to go with you willingly."

"She must—she shall go with me willingly."

"Then we must use some clever falsehood with her. Now listen. I have partly prepared her for this hour, not knowing when it might come. I have frequently explained to her how poor I am, and have told her that some time, when I could find a suitable place, she would have to go out in service. Now is the time to have her go. You are a lady in search of a maid."

"Yes, yes, I understand; a very good idea, too. But, call the girl down and let me be off. I am in a hurry."

Mrs. Osmond stepped out into the hall and called, and Polly came tripping lightly down the stairs.

"What do you want?" she asked; and then at sight of the stranger present she stopped and bowed politely.

"Sit down, Polly," Mrs. Osmond said kindly, "I have something to say to you."

Polly obeyed, wondering not a little what could be coming.

"I have often told you," Mrs. Osmond went on, "how poor we are, and that something would have to be done some time to give you a chance to earn your own living. You are out of place in this house, you so young and fair, and you must have a change. Now this lady wants you to go and live with her."

She is wealthy, you will have little or nothing to do, and you will have a fine home and fine clothes as long as you wish to stay."

"Yes," the strange woman added, "you shall be as my own child."

"But when am I to go?" Polly asked.

"Now, at once," was the woman's reply. "I want you at once or not at all."

"It is so sudden—"

"There—there, now, I will not listen to a word of it. I am very strange in my ways. I want you now. I offer you a nice home. Do you want it or not?"

"It shall be as you say, mamma," to Mrs. Osmond.

"Then you must go. It is the best thing you can do, I think. You can come and see me often, you know."

"Yes, as often as she likes," from the strange woman.

"Then I will go."

Twenty minutes later the carriage drove away, taking with it the woman it had brought, and pretty Polly Osmond.

CHAPTER III.

A MIDNIGHT SECRET.

MISS MAUD ELMORE was, as we have stated, about seventeen years of age, and beautiful.

She was the daughter of St. John Elmore, a wealthy and retired merchant of the great metropolis, and resided with her parents on one of the fashionable up-town streets.

She was highly educated, was the belle of the circle in which she moved, and was engaged to be married to Maurice Melvin, a descendant of one of the oldest families of the city.

Maurice Melvin was cashier of one of the great banks of the city, the one, in fact, in which Broadway Billy's "boodle"—as the boy was pleased to call his fortune—was deposited; and he it was who knocked Billy "out of time," as shown in our opening chapter.

Melvin was a young man about twenty-eight, strong, well built, and supple. He was good-looking too, and just the sort of man to fill the feminine eye and capture the feminine heart, with his easy manners and glib tongue.

On the afternoon of which we write, Miss Elmore had been down-town on some errand of business, and knowing the hour her lover usually left the bank, had managed to pass the bank about that time.

What followed has been told, and as she and Melvin left the scene of excitement, the lover asked:

"What caused the trouble? What led the young rascal to speak to you?"

"He called me 'Polly,' and perhaps mistook me for some one else. Not very flattering to me, I must say."

"Possibly he was honest enough in it all, and really did mistake you for another, but I do not believe it. Nature could not make another face like yours, so fair—so beautiful!"

"There, there, now, that will do, if you please. I shall take sides with the rascal now, and believe he did mistake me for some one else."

"That cannot turn me from my idea of it. The world does not contain another face like yours."

Thus they talked, drifting from the subject and entering upon Cupid's domain, until they arrived at a station of the Elevated railroad, where they boarded a train for up-town.

That evening Maurice Melvin called at the Elmore residence.

He had been engaged to Maud for several weeks, but no date had yet been fixed for the wedding to take place.

And he was impatient.

He was more impatient, in fact, than any one could guess. His fortune was spent; his account—or rather the bank's funds—were several thousand dollars short, and ruin and disgrace were staring him in the face.

If he could urge an early marriage it would save him. Miss Elmore had money—a fortune in her own right, and once his wife he would be able to save himself.

Within one month at most she must be his. So he decided.

During the evening he brought the question up, and it was freely discussed by him, Maud, and Mr. and Mrs. Elmore.

And so warmly, so strongly, did the young cashier plead his cause that the day was set for the twentieth of that month, then about two weeks away.

Melvin had gained his point, and was—saved! Saved?—Could he have foreseen the events of that night he would have trembled for his cause.

In order now to narrate those events in proper sequence, we must return to Polly Osmond and follow her to her new home.

The carriage, as we have described, was a closed one, a style of vehicle not frequently seen, and in it Polly could gain no knowledge of the direction she was being taken.

Her strange companion had little to say.

At last the carriage stopped, the driver sprung down and opened the door, and the strange woman said, kindly:

"Here we will get out, my dear. Please draw your veil down over your face before we do so."

Polly obeyed, and then the two got out and the carriage drove away.

They were evidently in a fashionable or aristocratic street, as the girl concluded, after a brief glance around, but in what part of the city she knew not.

The houses were all large, and of the most stately and respectable appearance.

Polly had but one brief moment to look about her

though, for the woman led her quickly up the steps of one of the finest of the houses, and on into the house.

There everything went to indicate that it was a house of wealth, and it was the finest place Polly had ever seen.

The woman led her up-stairs to a handsome sitting-room, and there bade her throw aside her veil, hat and wrap, and make herself at home.

"Your duties will be very light," she said. "In fact, you will have almost nothing to do. I want you more for company than for anything else."

"I shall strive to please you, m'am," Polly answered, "and will do whatever I am told."

"Very well, that is all I require. You have not yet learned my name, have you?"

"No, m'am."

"You may call me Mrs. Smith. That is my name."

"Yes, m'am."

"And your name, I understand, is Polly Osmond, is it not?"

"That is my name."

"Well, really, I do not like 'Polly' at all; and 'Osmond' does not please my ear. Have you any objection to my giving you a new name while you are with me?"

This seemed to Polly a rather ridiculous idea, but she felt that she must humor the woman in any whim she might have, and answered:

"No objection whatever, m'am; call me anything you wish."

"Very well then, let me see what it shall be. Now I like the name of 'Maud' ever so much, and I guess I will call you that. Maud—Maud what? Let me think. It must be something high-sounding and aristocratic, and pretty, too. What shall it be? Ah! I have it! I shall call you *Maud Elmore*."

"That is a very pretty name," Polly remarked.

"I am glad you like it, and now do not forget that that is to be your name."

"I shall not forget."

"Indeed, I must impress it upon your mind strongly. You will find this a house of mystery, but not of danger. You are about to enter upon a new life. Did I not promise to care for you as my own child? Then to-morrow when you awake you will find yourself the petted favorite of a household. Do not be surprised at anything you may see or hear, and—"

"Oh! Mrs. Smith, you alarm me!"

"Tut-tut! There is nothing to be alarmed at. Only bear this one thing in mind: Do not for one moment forget that your name is *Maud Elmore*. Your real name must not be mentioned. Do you understand?"

"Yes, m'am."

"Very well. You may not see me to-morrow, but on no account must you ask for me. I shall not be near you, perhaps, but so long as you claim the name I have given you, you are safe. What is your name now?"

"*Maud Elmore*."

"That is right; do not forget it. And now we will say no more upon the subject. Only bear in mind what I have told you. You may now amuse yourself with the books and pictures here until we are called to tea."

Billy was almost frightened. What was the meaning of all this mystery? She wished herself safely back in the old tenement.

She took up a book and tried to read, but her thoughts were too busy, and it was a great relief when Mrs. Smith invited her down to tea.

At the table—she and Mrs. Smith were the only persons present—she was addressed as *Miss Elmore*, in the presence of the one old servant, and to that name she responded.

About ten o'clock Mrs. Smith conducted her upstairs to a handsomely-furnished bedroom, which she told her was to be hers.

"We are alone to-night," the woman said, "but to-morrow the rest of my family will be here. You will behold strange faces then. Do not forget your name—*Maud Elmore*."

And so Polly was left to retire and dream about her strange adventures.

About an hour after midnight the strange "Mrs. Smith" appeared in the hall with a small lamp in hand, and ascended to the top floor of the house.

There the ceiling was low, and a short flight of steps led up to the scuttle.

Ascending these steps, the woman unfastened the scuttle and silently moved it a little ways open.

Then she descended again, put down her lamp, and waited.

In about ten minutes, perhaps, the scuttle was silently opened to its full extent by unseen hands, and then the black face of an old negress appeared at the opening.

"Am it all right?" she whispered.

The woman below answered with a nod, and motioned her to come down.

The negress obeyed, and when she reached the floor the strange woman inquired:

"Is it all right over there?"

"Yes," was the reply, "it is all right."

"Good! I think we shall be successful. Let us hasten."

Quickly but silently they descended to the next floor, where Polly Osmond slept.

Going to a large room in

The odor it emitted proclaimed it to be chloroform.

Having prepared the handkerchief, the woman returned the bottle to her pocket, and then advanced to the bed and held the handkerchief over the girl's face.

In a moment her design was accomplished, and the girl was in a sleep from which it would not be easy to awaken her.

Quickly, then, she was wrapped in a large shawl, lifted from the bed, and carried from the room.

Out into the hall her bearers went, up the stairs to the next floor, and thence on up the short flight of steps and out upon the roof.

What could be their object?

The lamp was left behind, of course, and the scuttle-door was partly closed, and then they lifted up the unconscious girl and carried her away across the roofs of other houses.

Finally, at the sixth house from their starting point, they stopped.

Here, too, the scuttle stood partly open.

Opening it wide, the old negress descended, having laid Polly Osmond down, and disappeared.

In a moment she came back, whispered that all was right, and taking the girl up in her strong arms, carried her down into the house, closely followed by the mysterious woman.

The plan of this house proved to be the same as that from which they had just come.

Cautiously, noiselessly, they bore their fair burden down the stairs to the next floor, and then the negress opened a door and they entered a room.

This room was a fac-simile—if the word will apply—of the one from which they had just taken the sleeping girl, and upon the bed lay a veritable flesh-and-blood likeness of the girl herself.

This was the room of Maud Elmore, and the sleeper was she.

Quickly the chloroform was applied to Miss Elmore as it had been to Polly Osmond, and then she was lifted from the bed.

Then the two girls were exchanged, the one for the other. The clothing of one was put on the other, even to rings and ear-rings. Not an article belonging to one was left upon the person of the other.

When this was accomplished, then Polly Osmond was placed in the bed and left there, and Maud Elmore was carried out of the room, out of the house, and to the room in the other house from which Polly had been taken.

Then the old negress returned to the Elmore residence, the scuttle-doors of both houses were closed and secured as before, and the night rolled on apace.

CHAPTER IV.

BILLY'S BANK-BOOK.

"SWEET pertaters! I smell smoke!"

Needless to say the words were uttered by Broadway Billy; his pet exclamation proclaims that it was he.

It was long past the midnight hour, and silence reigned in the old tenement.

But the silence was soon rudely broken.

Barely had Billy uttered the words we quote, springing out of bed as he did so, when the loud cry of "Fire! fire!" rung through the house from one of the lower floors.

Instantly all was wild confusion.

Doors and windows were flung open wide, cries for help were heard, and with wild fury the flames burst forth with a roar like the sea.

Once the windows were opened a draught was created, and the old house was doomed.

Broadway Billy took in the situation at a glance.

"Come, mom!" he shouted, throwing open his door. "git inter yer clothes in two winks, or ye're a goner! No time fer foolin', I tell ye! It's git right up an' hump yerself ter git that!"

"Oh! we are lost, we are lost!" cried Mrs. Weston, as she ran to the window, wringing her hands.

"Hang me if you won't be, if ye don't git a move on ye!" Billy yelled. "What be ye standin' there for? D'y'e wanter be made up inter roast? Git yer clothes on!"

This started his good mother to action.

Billy had already dressed himself, and in his best clothes, putting his older suit on over them. He was quick to think and quick to act.

"Now fer that bank-book!" he exclaimed. "I mean ter save that, you bet! Where did ye put it, mom? That represents my boodle in th' bank."

Mrs. Weston indicated where it was, and Billy had it safe into his pocket in an instant.

"Come! mom, come!" he cried, as he ran out into the hall, which was now full of black and blinding smoke, and glanced down at the sea of flame below; "if ye git cornered here it'll make ye curl yer toes, you bet! Come! don't try ter git th' stove under yer arm nor th' lookin'glass inter yer pocket, fer it can't be did! There ain't no time ter monkey around now, I tell ye! We've got ter—Sweet pertaters!"

With that exclamation the boy sprung down the stairs, four steps at a stride, to the floor below, and then he dashed into the rooms occupied by Mrs. Osmond.

"Polly!" he called, "Polly, where are ye?"

All was darkness there, except when the glare from the fire reflected on the walls, and there was no reply.

Billy had matches, and lighting one he made a hasty but thorough search of the rooms.

Neither Polly nor Mrs. Osmond was there.

"They've got out, thank goodness!" Billy exclaimed, and then he darted up-stairs again to his mother.

"Come! be ye ready?" he called.

"Yes, I'm ready now," was the reply, and Mrs. Weston appeared with both arms full of things she had gathered up in her haste and excitement.

At that moment, with a loud crash, the stairs below fell, and their retreat was cut off.

Nor were they the only ones. Another family on the same floor, on the opposite side of the hall, consisting of a widow and three children, were in the same dangerous predicament.

"There's no time ter be lost," cried Billy, "we've got ter take th' roof! Come, mom! Come, Mrs. Hall!" and catching up one of the latter's children the boy started for the roof.

He was quickly followed. It was now the only hope they had.

As soon as all were up, Billy closed the trap, and then he ran to the edge and looked down upon the roof of the next house.

That house was about twenty feet lower than the big tenement, and firemen were already upon its roof.

"Hello!" Billy shouted, "any o' you fellers got a ladder about ye? If ye have, jes' run it up here. There's a hull fambly o' folks up here, an' they're makin' th' worst kick ye ever heard tell of 'gainst bein' roasted."

"You'll have to jump," came back the reply; "we can't get a ladder here in time."

"Well, can't ye get a bed out there for us ter jump on?"

"Yes; hold on half a minute," and one of the men disappeared into the house below, soon returning with a straw bed which he laid down in about the right position.

"Now," he shouted, "come down!"

It was now almost as light as day, and those upon the roof could be plainly seen. They were now close to the edge, the fire having already burst through the scuttle.

Billy turned at once to Mrs. Hall and told her to jump, but she would not do so till her children were safe, nor could the latter be induced to leave her; so there was but one thing to do.

Catching up the oldest child, a boy of ten, Billy pulled him to the edge, shouted to the fireman below to catch him, and pushed him over.

Down he went, and the firemen, with the straw bed, caught him safely.

Then the other two were disposed of in like manner.

"Now, who next?" Billy shouted. "Come, one or t'other o' you women take th' leap fer life!"

Mrs. Hall was the first to go. Anxiety to be once more with her children lent the necessary courage, and she jumped.

She, too, landed in safety.

"Now, mom," cried Billy, "your turn now! One, two, three—an' a go! Come, now, it's no time ter pow-wow about it; it's a clean case o' life an' death!"

"You go first, my son; I—"

"Sweet pertaters! D'y'e wanter be cooked, then? Jump, I tell ye!"

The frightened woman advanced to the edge, made a move as though to obey, and then backed out.

"Oh! I can't, I can't!" she cried. "I—"

"Th' dickens ye can't!" cried Billy, and with a gentle push he sent her so far forward that she lost her balance and had to go.

She, too, was safely caught; but the things she had had in her arms, not the least important of which was a wash-board, went flying in all directions.

Billy was just on the point of following, when suddenly a strong hand grabbed him and pulled him back and down upon the roof.

One quick glance revealed who it was.

"Let go of me, Abner Hawk!" Billy commanded. "Do you want to be the cause of our losing our lives? Let go, I say!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" the other laughed. "There won't be one of us lose his life, an' that one won't be me!"

Abner Hawk was a young man of twenty. He was good-looking and clever, but a rascal at heart.

He was in love with Polly Osmond, but had found in Billy, boy though he was, so formidable a rival that he had had but little chance or hope of winning her.

He had often vowed that he would put Billy out of his way, and it would seem that this was an attempt to do so.

But if he had found in Billy a formidable rival, he now found him a dangerous combatant as well.

Hawk had the advantage at the start.

He, creeping up behind Billy, had pulled him down and then placed himself on top.

But Billy did not relish this order of things, and made every effort to throw his enemy off.

Meantime, no one below could account for the boy's sudden disappearance.

They could not see him, nor had they seen Hawk pull him backward, and all haste was made by the firemen to get a ladder to the roof to climb to his rescue.

And haste was necessary, too, for the fire was fast eating its way through the roof of the big tenement, and the house next to it, the one on which the firemen stood, was already burning.

No time was to be lost.

No one realized it more than did Broadway Billy himself, and he fought desperately.

"Let me up, you fool!" he panted. "We'll both be burned alive if ye don't. Even if ye git th' best o' me ye won't dare ter 'scape, fer they'll 'rest ye fer my murder."

"Don't let that worry ye, my pippin," retorted Hawk. "I'll swear I tried hard ter save ye. D'y'e know what I'm goin' ter do with ye?"

"You won't do much if I once git half a show at ye, ye coward!"

"An' that ye won't git. I'm goin' ter drag ye to th' scuttle there an' pitch ye down, neck an' heels. I've warned ye ter stand clear o' me many a time, but ye would poke around, an' now ye've got ter pay fer it."

These words were exchanged all in one brief moment, and then the young villain partly rose up in order to get a better hold of his victim.

Instantly Billy took advantage of the moment, made a sudden spring, rolled over under his antagonist and regained his feet.

But Hawk was upon him again at once, and Billy had to fight with desperate fury.

It is folly to give a man's strength to a boy hero, but we must say that in this instance Abner Hawk found about all he could handle. Billy was quick as lightning, and every move he made was made with a purpose.

The struggle had now lasted about two minutes, and both breathed heavily.

Presently Billy's foot slipped, and in an instant his enemy had him once more upon his back.

"Now, curse ye!" he panted. "I'll fix ye!"

But he reckoned without giving full weight to Billy's side of the question.

As he fell, by some chance the boy's hand came in contact with a piece of brick, and grasping it, he watched for an opportunity to use it with effect.

The chance soon came.

As Hawk uttered the words above, he drew back his right arm to deal Billy a blow in the face. The blow came, but Billy had dodged his head away, and the rascal's fist struck the hard boards. Then he, Billy, as quick as a flash, threw up his right-hand and dealt the rascal a terrific blow on the side of his head with the brick.

That ended the struggle, for Hank fell over insensible.

By this time the whole top of the house was ablaze, and Billy would have been fully justified in leaving his enemy to his fate.

But Billy had other ideas of right and wrong, and laying hold of the fellow by the feet, he dragged him to the edge of the roof, shouted to those below, and pushed him over.

Down he went, falling partly upon the straw bed, and was picked up at once and carried to a place of safety.

The crowds, believing that Billy had been back again into the burning house, sent up a wild cheer, and in the midst of it the boy jumped down from his perilous position.

And he was not a moment too soon, for barely had he and the firemen, who, by the way, were just putting up a ladder to go to the rescue, when Billy first reappeared; barely had they made good their escape from the lower house when the old tenement fell, carrying the smaller house with it.

Those old buildings, as dry as tinder, burn rapidly, and in no other class of buildings is fire more to be dreaded.

Billy was quite some time in finding his mother, but at last he did find her, and she, poor soul! was running aimlessly about, calling for her boy, and pressing a broken frying-pan to her breast.

"Sweet pertaters' mom, ye saved somethin' didn't ye!" the boy cried, when he found her. "Guess ye'd better throw it away, though. It ain't much of a start to'r beginnin' housekeepin' ag'in."

Billy and his mother had friends living in another street, and to them they went and were kindly received.

"We'll stay with ye till mornin'," Billy said, "an' then we'll strike out an' see about settin' up another domestic altar. I've got a little boodle in th' bank, an' I'll draw out enough ter make good our loss, an'—Sweet pertaters!"

In mentioning his bank account the boy naturally put his hand to his pocket to assure himself that his book was there, and to his horror he found that it was gone.

Without a word he wheeled and darted out of the house like a shot from a gun.

CHAPTER V.

SCORES ONE FOR BILLY.

"Sweet pertaters! I don't know as much as I did last year, an' I didn't know any too much then. I'd orter be tied to a mule's tail an' have both ears kicked off. I don't know what I'm good fer, anyhow. I'm too dumb ter drive pigs. I've got ter make a better showin' than this, or I'll lose th' confidence of Inspector Br—Hello! What's th' matter?"

Billy was running along t' e street at good speed, muttering his thoughts half-aloud, when suddenly a policeman thrust his arm and club out in front of him from behind a big telegraph pole, and brought him to a stop.

"What are you running for?" the officer demanded in response to the boy's exclamative inquiry.

"'Cause I want ter git that," Billy replied, briefly.

"Get where? Where are you going?"

"I'm goin' fer a doctor, post haste, with a special stamp in th' upper right hand corner. Please don't detain th' mail."

"Where are you going for him? Do you know where he lives?"

"Sweet pertaters! d'y'e s'pose I'd be goin' ahead under full steam an' all sail set if I didn't know where I was goin'? Come, old

"I asked you what doctor you're going for?"
"I'm goin' fer Dr. Strange, No. — Centre street; office hours eight to ten an' two to four—when he happens ter be in. Any further information I kin give?"

"No, I guess not; you may go on."

Billy had given the correct name and address of a doctor whom he happened to know, and the officer was satisfied and allowed him to continue on his way.

The boy darted off at once, and was soon out of sight.

"P'lomen is all right," he grumbled, "but they wants ter know too much. S'pose I'd been red-hot after a sneak who had jest robbed me o' my gold watch or diming studs, if I had sech things; he'd got away sure. Sweet pertaters! ain't I after a sneak, though? Ain't I after th' p'ison reptile that's got my bank-book! Ginger bread and hurricanes! it makes me grind my teeth in rage ter think of it! Abner Hawk wasn't layin' so much fer me as he was fer my boddle, an' I'll bet a cow on it. Wonder why I couldn't think of it afore? I'm after him, though, an' if I don't make him sick it'll be 'cause I can't, that's all!"

And on he ran, in the direction of the late fire.

When he arrived upon the scene, nothing remained of the old tenement but a blazing pile of ruins and rubbish on the spot where it had so lately stood.

A great crowd was still there, held back by policemen, and Billy found it necessary to go round a full block in order to gain the point he was aiming for.

When he had made the detour and come around on the opposite side of the fire, he entered a saloon which was still open.

It was a miserable den, and its doors were usually open to its depraved and lawless frequenters nearly all night.

Billy knew the place, and knew that there his enemy, Abner Hawk, spent most of his time.

The rascal had come to, shortly after Billy had pitched him from the roof of the old tenement, and the boy had heard him ask the firemen to take him to this saloon.

The place was well filled, more so than usual, owing to the fire, and all was bustle and excitement.

"Say, mister," said Billy, addressing the bartender, "wasn't Hawkey brought in here a few minutes ago? I want ter see him."

"Yes, he's there in th' back room," was the reply. "He's got a cut in th' head."

"That so? How did he git that?"

"Says a timber struck him at th' fire."

"Did, eh? Well, that's too bad. Sorry fer him. I'll step in an' see him."

"Yes, you'll find him right in there."

Billy passed into the rear room, where he found Mr. Hawk seated in a chair and holding a wet towel to his head.

He looked to be in anything but a jolly temper, unless we say he was in a jolly bad one.

Billy took one glance at him, and then said:

"Hello! Hawkey, old rocks, how goes it?"

The young villain looked quickly up, and then sprang to his feet with a cry of rage.

"Curse ye!" he cried, "are you here?"

"Reckon I am," Billy answered; "that's th' way appearances seems ter p'int, anyhow."

"Well, I'll settle with ye afore ye git out ag'in, so just make yer mind to that."

"I wouldn't if I was you, Hawkey."

"Ye wouldn't! Why wouldn't ye?"

"It might not be healthy."

"D'y'e mean ter say ye're armed?"

"Come fer me once, an' see."

Billy's words and manner seemed to indicate that he had a revolver or two somewhere about his person, and all ready for use.

Really he hadn't anything more dangerous than a small pocket-knife.

Hawkey settled back in his chair.

"What d'y'e want?" he asked.

"I've come ter see ye," Billy replied. "I heard ye got hit on th' head with a stick o' timber at th' fire, an' bein' as ye're an old friend I thought I'd have ter call on ye an' inquire about yer state o' health."

Hawkey was fairly purple with rage.

"Shut up an' git out o' here," he cried, "or I'll brain ye!"

"Don't you try it!" Billy exclaimed. "If ye do ye'll be sorry, sure pop. There'll be mourning at your tepee, *sure*."

Hawkey was the only person in the room, and Billy could afford to bully him a little.

"Well, what d'y'e want ter see me fer? I hain't got nothin' o' yours, have I? Have ye lost anything?"

"Not as I knows of," Billy answered, now sure that the fellow *had* his book; "I've come ter see ye on biz."

"Well, spit it out then, an' let's hear what it is."

"There won't nobody hear us, will there?"

"No, not if ye don't holler it at me."

The rascal was now a little interested and curious to know what the boy had to say.

Billy did not keep him in suspense.

"You knows Polly Osmond, I reckon, don't ye?" he said.

"Yes; what of her?"

"Well, I'll tell ye. Ye see I've been tryin' to be a little sweet on Polly fer a long time, but she wouldn't cotton to me fer a cent. She'd talk to me, but when it kum to talkin' love to her she wasn't there, an' I made up my mind she was in love with somebody else."

"And is she?"

"She is, fer a fact."

"And who is that somebody else?"

"You."

"Me!"

"Sure's ye'r born."

"I don't believe it! She never used me half decent, an' often wouldn't look at me when I'd speak to her. Tell ye I don't believe it!"

"Can't help it whether ye do or not. I'll bet a cow is so, an' now I'll prove it to ye. D'y'e know where Polly is?"

"No, do you?"

"Allow me ter smile. She wasn't burned up, that's sure; an' I know of a little lady who has jest been given shelter in th' house of a friend over on Crosby street, who wants ter see Mr. Abner Hawk."

The young villain was upon his feet at once.

"Come," he said, "let's go. I'm satisfied now. I see through it all. She's been a-playin' with my regard all along, an' now when she needs a friend she sends fer me. Bully! Come on, an' we'll go at once."

"Hold yer hosses jest a minute now, an' don't let 'em git away from ye. I'm not done chinuin' yet."

"Well, tell me what else ye've got ter say then, an' be quick about it, too."

"Well, I want ter say this: I didn't come here ter tell ye this 'cause I love ye, Mr. Hawk, not by a good deal; an' I'm jest as much yer enemy as I was afore. Still, I'm goin' ter do th' square thing an' take ye ter th' house where th' little lady I mentioned is awaitin'. After that, then we're on th' war-path ag'in as big as Injuns. You know me, I reckon."

"Yes, I know ye, I know ye to be one of the sharpest boys in all New York."

"Oh! no I ain't, not by a hatful! I'm too slow to drive pigs. Come, though, if ye're all ready, an' we'll go."

The rascal was ready—even anxious to be off, and together they set out.

"How's yer head where that 'stick o' timber' hit ye?" Billy inquired as they walked along.

The only reply he got was a growl.

They continued on in silence then, and Broadway Billy conducted his enemy straight to the house where he and his mother had been given shelter.

This, too, was a tenement-house.

When they entered Billy said:

"Now, Hawkey, you stand right here in th' hall till I go up an' git a light an' tell 'em you're here."

"All right," the fellow agreed, and Billy hastened up-stairs.

He had been absent from the house but about ten minutes or so, and all were up yet.

Making a hasty explanation, and asking the man whose room he was in to assist him in his plan, he caught up the lamp and stepped out and told his enemy to come up.

Billy's friend, the man who had given him and his mother shelter, was a car-driver, a big, muscular man, and he stationed himself behind the door with a stout club in hand.

Up came Mr. Hawk, and entered the room without a shadow of suspicion.

He soon found, though, that he was in a trap. Billy closed the door behind him at once, and then the big car-driver lifted his club and exclaimed:

"Look here! you rascal, you! if you've got a bank-book as belongs to this here lad, jest trot it out!"

Hawkey was thunderstruck. He turned pale, glared at Billy, and cried:

"This is a trap, curse ye! Ye lied ter me! Ye said Polly was here, an'—"

"Hold on, now," Billy admonished, "ye're a gettin' too fast. I didn't say nothin' of th' sort. I said there was a 'little lady' here, an' there she is—my respected mother."

"Oh! but I'll fix ye fer this! I'll—"

"You're all blow. Come, out with that book, or there'll be another stick o' timber a-fallin' onto yer head."

"I ain't got no book o' yours. How could I get it?"

"I'll mighty soon see whether ye have or not," declared the car-driver, "I'll search ye;" and he moved a step nearer.

Abner Hawk saw that he was in a tight place, with no chance to escape, and he knew, whether the others did or not, "that he *had* the boy's book; so snatching it from his pocket he threw it upon the floor.

"Now let me out o' here," he demanded.

Billy picked up his book, glanced at it to see that it was all right, and then said:

"All right, my hearty, *git!*" and he opened the door for the crestfallen rascal to retire.

"You'll pay for this, you will," the latter threatened, as he hastened to make good his escape.

"All right," Billy called after him; "if you can play me any better trick, go ahead. Look out another 'stick o' timber' don't hit ye, though."

Next day, as soon as the bank was open, Billy and his mother called there and drew out two hundred dollars, and having already found rooms, Mrs. Weston set out to buy the necessary furniture to begin housekeeping anew.

Meanwhile the origin of the fire in the old Center street tenement remained a mystery. The firemen, however, had made discoveries which led them to believe that it was the work of an incendiary.

And such, though they could not prove it, was the fact—a fact which has much to do with the progress of our romance.

CHAPTER VI.

POLLY OSMOND'S PERPLEXITY.

We are impatient to return to the Elmore residence and follow the adventures of pretty Polly Osmond.

What a strange position she was placed in! Can the reader imagine a situation stranger? She, a

beautiful girl, the very likeness of the true Maud Elmore in face and form, and yet so unlike her in education and social refinement, to be suddenly transferred into a new life—a new personality.

Maud Elmore had been reared in the very lap of luxury; Polly Osmond in all the poverty of a downtown tenement.

Imagine, if you can, the results of such an unheard-of complication.

Here was pretty Polly, the child of the tenement, with only a common school apology for an education, suddenly transformed into Miss Maud Elmore, the educated, accomplished and wealthy society belle.

And it has been impressed upon her mind that she must claim the name of Maud Elmore as her own.

What must be the outcome?

When Polly awoke it was broad day. The sun was shining into her windows, and in another room could be heard the voice of some one singing, singing merrily but not loudly.

Polly recognized the room at once—or supposed she did—as the one into which the strange Mrs. Smith had shown her on the previous night.

It will be remembered that the room in the other house was like this one in its general appearance and appointments—in fact, as we have said, was almost a *fac-simile*.

Polly sat up in bed and looked around for a moment, and then slipped quietly out upon the floor.

The first thing to attract her notice to herself was the richness of her night-robe.

She examined it with both admiration and surprise.

How had it been put on her, and she sound asleep and her door locked?

She could not understand it.

Then her eyes fell upon the several rings on her fingers, one of which was a brilliant and costly diamond.

What could it mean? Why such folly—as she mentally termed it?

Was she in a household of lunatics, or was she dreaming? No, she was awake, and it must have been some peculiar whim of the strange Mrs. Smith to prepare the surprise for her.

While she was still admiring her rings the singing in the other room ceased, and the door leading to the bath-room opened.

A young woman, Miss E'more's maid, entered.

She was good-looking, stylishly dressed, and only her jaunty lace cap and snowy apron gave evidence of her rank in the household.

"Good-morning," she said, with a bow; "you are up a little earlier than usual."

Miss Elmore would at once have given some witty reply, and then followed it with directions concerning her toilet.

Polly did nothing of the kind.

She said good-morning soberly, bowed to the maid respectfully, and then stood and looked at her.

The maid, much disconcerted, knew not what to make of this, and an awkward pause followed.

"Shall I prepare your bath?" she presently inquired.

"Must I take a bath?" Polly asked, innocently.

The maid stood and stared at her in amazement.

"I asked you if I must take a bath," Polly repeated.

"I—I—it is just as you wish," the maid stammered. "I will prepare it if you wish."

"No," said Polly, "do not do so. I do not bathe very frequently, and I may take cold. May I ask who you are?"

"Good heavens!" the maid cried, clasping her hands and turning pale, "what has come over you, Miss Elmore?"

This recalled to Polly's mind all that the strange Mrs. Smith had said.

What could all this mystery

I— Oh! I see it now! You are merely acting. What an actress you would make!"

The humorous side of the strange affair now revealed itself, and Polly had to smile.

"Then you do not want your bath?" the maid inquired.

"No, I guess not."

"Shall I put up your hair then?"

"Yes, you may do that."

To the maid's idea, these were the first rational words her fair mistress had spoken, and she looked greatly relieved.

Placing a chair for Polly, the latter sat down, and the maid was soon at work.

The reader may question whether these two girls, Polly Osmond and Maud Elmore, the one reared in poverty and the other in wealth, could be so alike that it would be possible for Polly to pass under the eyes of Maud's maid without discovery.

We answer yes.

Polly, poor though she was, had always been scrupulously neat, and her hair was her pride. It might well have been the envy of many a richer girl, and certainly Maud Elmore's could not surpass it in beauty.

Then as regarded the hands of the two, they were nearer alike than one might have thought possible. Polly's were used to work, of course, but she had taken the best of care of them, and they were soft and fair. Those of Maud, who took delight in all kinds of out-door sports, were equally as firm and brown.

The two girls were in all respects alike, except, as we have said, in the matter of education and refinement.

When the maid had finished Polly's hair, she asked:

"What dress will you wear?"

"Oh! any one you please," Polly answered. "Let me see them."

The maid threw open the doors of a large wardrobe, revealing an array of pretty dresses that caused Polly's heart to flutter.

"Oh! my, how pretty!" she cried, springing up and clapping her hands together in delight, and she ran forward to look at them.

The face of the maid became troubled again.

"Will you wear this one?" she asked, taking down a beautiful morning gown that had been one of Maud's favorites.

"Oh! no, there are prettier ones here than that, I am sure. I guess I will wear *this* one."

The one she indicated was a handsome evening dress.

"Surely you do not mean it!" the maid exclaimed.

"Why not? It is as pretty as any of them, I am sure."

"But, that is an evening dress, and—"

"What is the difference? I am sure the color will be becoming to me, and I will put it on."

The maid could stand no more. Surely her fair mistress had gone mad. And bursting into tears, she fled from the room and down the stairs.

When she stopped, it was to knock at the door of a room on the next floor below.

"Who is there?" a voice inquired.

"It is I—Miss Elmore's maid, and oh! Mrs. Elmore, I wish you would come up-stairs as quickly as you can; I do not know what is the matter with Miss Maud."

"Heavens! I hope she is not ill!" and the door opened at once and a woman came hurriedly out.

She was a pleasant-faced little woman, yet had an expression of sadness, and her hair was as white as snow, although she could not have been more than thirty-eight years of age at most.

"No, she is not ill," the maid assured, "but I fear she is out of her mind."

"Out of her mind! Oh! what can it mean?" and drawing her wrap close about her, Mrs. Elmore hurried up the stairs, the maid following close behind.

When they entered the room, Polly had laid aside the evening dress and was trying on a rich ball dress.

At sight of Mrs. Elmore she paused.

"Oh! my child! what has come over you?" Mrs. Elmore cried, as she caught the girl in her arms and kissed her.

Polly remained passive in her embrace, and as soon as she was released, asked:

"Who are you, m'am?"

"Who am I? Oh! my God! do you not know me—me, your mother?"

"You are Mrs. Elmore, then?"

"Of course I am Mrs. Elmore. Good heavens! what has come over you? Do you know your own name?"

"Yes; it is Maud Elmore."

"Oh! my child, my child! Why are you acting so strangely? You are not yourself. Even your voice is slightly changed. Have you no kiss for me?"

Polly burst into tears, threw aside the fancy dress, and sat down.

"Why do you cry?" Mrs. Elmore asked.

"Oh! m'am, I am so unhappy. I am sorry I came here, and I wish I could tell you all."

Polly's resolve to carry on the deception was failing her. In fact, it was an impossible task; she was not equal to it.

"Sorry you came here! What do you mean by that? And why do you call me m'am?"

The girl's only reply was to weep bitterly.

"Come, we must dress her," Mrs. Elmore said, decisively. "and then, Mary, you must call Mr. Elmore here at once, and send for a doctor."

The maid took down the wrap Miss Elmore usually wore in the morning, and Polly allowed them to put it on her.

Then the maid went and called Mr. Elmore, and sent one of the servants for the family doctor.

Mr. Elmore soon appeared.

"What is wrong?" he demanded. "Is Maud ill?"

"She is worse than ill, I fear," Mrs. Elmore replied. "Speak to her."

"What is it, my child?" Mr. Elmore said kindly, laying his hand gently upon Polly's head; "why are you crying?"

"Oh! sir, I—"

"Heavens! why do you call me 'sir'? Do you not recognize me?"

"I never saw you before in my life, sir. I am—"

"My God! has any one gone for a doctor? She is out of her mind."

"No—no, I am *not* out of my mind, sir; I am as sane as you. But, I am not your child. I am not Maud Elmore, but Polly Osmond. I was brought here yesterday."

Mr. and Mrs. Elmore looked at her sorrowfully and pityingly, the latter unable to restrain her tears.

"You were brought here yesterday?" Mr. Elmore repeated; "who brought you here? and where did you come from?"

"I was brought by a Mrs. Smith, sir, who engaged me to be her maid, and I came from No.—Centre street. My name is Polly Osmond."

"At what time did you come?" Mr. Elmore inquired.

"It was about four o'clock, I think. I ate supper here with Mrs. Smith, and then at bed-time she brought me up to this room."

Mr. and Mrs. Elmore looked at each other in bewilderment.

CHAPTER VII.

MORE MYSTERY STILL.

MRS. ELMORE was the first to speak.

"Can it be, and after so many—many years?" she said.

"It must be so," her husband averred.

"And what will you do?" she asked.

"I shall put a detective on the case, and that at once. No time is to be lost."

"But, had we not better wait until the doctor comes?" It is possible—

"It is impossible! This girl is *not* Maud."

Here was the truth, and Polly was more than pleased to have it known.

"Will you please let me return home at once?" she asked. "I am sorry for my part in this strange affair, mystery, or whatever it is. I came here, as I said, simply to become the maid of the Mrs. Smith who brought me."

"And you say you came here about four o'clock yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes, sir."

"And ate supper here with her?"

"Yes, sir."

"In this room?"

"No, sir; it was down-stairs in the dining-room."

"At what time was that?"

"About six o'clock."

"Who was at the table besides you and her?"

"No one, sir; we were alone."

"See here! are you speaking the truth?"

"I am, sir."

"It is strange—strange."

"And why," asked Mrs. Elmore, "did you tell me your name was Maud Elmore?"

"Because Mrs. Smith told me to. She said she did not like my name, and gave me that one, telling me I must use it and no other."

"And where did you get those rings?"

"I do not know, sir. They were not on my fingers when I went to sleep."

"And do you mean to tell us that you retired to this room at bed-time? and slept here alone all night?"

"Yes, sir."

"By heavens! this is simply incomprehensible!"

"On my word," declared Polly, earnestly, "I am speaking only the truth."

Mrs. Elmore turned to the maid, and asked:

"At what hour did Maud retire last night?"

"It was about ten o'clock, I think."

"Did she act as usual?"

"Yes, m'am."

"And did you retire at the same time?"

"Yes, m'am."

"And what time was it when you retired?" to Polly.

"It was not later than ten, m'am."

"And you are certain it was in this house and in this room?"

"Yes, I am sure it was. I remember looking at those beautiful visages when I first came in, and also at other pretty things."

"And where did this mysterious Mrs. Smith go to?" demanded Mr. Elmore.

"I supposed she went to her own room."

"Did you expect to see her this morning?"

"Well, no; that is, she told me I might not see her, and if I did not, I must not ask for her. She said she was alone then, but that in the morning the rest of her family would be here, and then I would see strange faces; and then telling me not to forget the name she had given me, she went out and left me alone."

"Strange—strange! And what else did she tell you?"

"She told me not for a moment to forget my name, the name she had given me—Maud Elmore; and that my true name must not be mentioned."

"Anything more?"

"Yes, she said more, but I fear I do not remember it all. She said I would find this a house of mystery, and that I was about to enter upon a new life. She had promised to care for me as her own child,

and said that when I awoke I would find myself the petted favorite of all, and that I must not be surprised at anything I might see."

Her identity acknowledged, Polly was her natural self, and rattled off her sentences with full spirit.

And every word she uttered carried with it the conviction of truth.

Presently the doctor came.

He was a fat man, about sixty years of age, and very decided in his opinions.

The situation was explained to him, and the question evolved was: "Is this our daughter, with her mind disordered? or is it some one else?"

The old doctor felt the importance of the question and of the case, and reserved his decision for some moments.

Meanwhile he glanced around the room as though he expected the answer he should give to appear in handwriting on the wall.

Suddenly his eyes rested upon a table that was literally heaped with books—books of poetry and fiction.

"Ha!" he cried, advancing to it, "what have we here?"

"Those are my daughter's books," Mrs. Elmore explained. "She is very fond of reading."

"Fond of reading, are you, eh?" the doctor demanded, turning suddenly upon Polly.

"Yes, sir," Polly answered instantly and truthfully. "I am *very* fond of reading."

The doctor smiled knowingly.

"The secret is here," he declared, clapping his hand down upon the books and looking at Mr. Elmore.

"What do you mean?" Mr. Elmore asked.

"Too much reading."

"Oh! I cannot think that," said Mrs. Elmore, "for Maud has read everything ever since she was a child."

"Worse and worse" the doctor cried. "Say, young woman," he demanded, turning to the maid, "is Miss Elmore in the habit of reading at night?"

"Yes, sir," came the reply.

"Lies awake half the night, no doubt, with book in hand."

"Sometimes she does, sir," the girl had to admit.

"Can you show me the book she read last night?"

"I think it was the one you have your hand on, sir."

The doctor took it up and opened it in a manner of contempt for it, turned the leaves, and then exclaimed:

"Here it is, as sure as you live!"

"What?" queried Mr. Elmore, stepping to his side.

"The clew to this whole affair," the doctor declared. And then in a lower tone: "See these names. Here is one 'Polly,' another 'Smith,' and I have no doubt if we look further we shall find 'Osmond,' too, and the whole confounded legion of them."

"Well, and what do you make out of it?"

you are, though this experience is almost enough to make me doubt my sanity."

"There is more than you can guess hidden in this affair, and I and Mrs. Elmore have a request to ask of you."

"What is it, sir?"

"It is this: That you will act, to the best of your ability, the part of a crazy girl. Do nothing violent, you understand, but act well the part the doctor has given you. Can you play the piano?"

"No, sir."

"Can you speak French?"

"No, sir," with a laugh.

"Then you must act as though you have suddenly forgotten nearly all you ever knew. Can you do this?"

"I think so, sir."

"You see, whoever it was brought you here, they at the same time spirited Maud away; and in this way you can aid us to find her."

"I will do as well as I can, sir."

"Remember the caution given you by the mysterious Mrs. Smith, and claim the name of Maud Elmore as your own."

"Yes, sir, I understand, and will do as well as I can."

"And you," turning to the maid, "keep well this secret. If I hear of your having told any one, I will discharge you instantly."

"I shall not breathe it, sir. I will act as though it were really so. And, in fact, I am more than half-inclined to believe the doctor is right, for how could two persons look so much alike?"

"We will not stop to question that now. The fact is before us, and it is this: Our daughter, Maud Elmore, has suddenly become insane. When we leave this room it will be made known to the household and to the public. Act well your part."

Mrs. Elmore followed her husband from the room then, and they went to a room below, where they repeated the words which open this chapter.

"Can it be true?" Mrs. Elmore questioned.

And her husband answered:

"It certainly must be so."

They, then, had some secret knowledge of some event of the past which connected Polly Osmond with the present.

So it would seem. But what could this secret be? We must push on and learn it.

The news of Maud Elmore's sad misfortune was soon known to the entire household, and was soon carried beyond the doors.

And sad news it was to those who were her friends in that charmed circle, "society," and startling news it was to all.

Polly kept close to her room, and those who called to see her were startled at the change.

In the mean time, Mr. Elmore had telegraphed to Police Headquarters for a detective, and one had been sent.

He was a short, dark man, with a peculiar habit of eternally swinging his eye-glasses round and round in his left hand.

He was closeted for an hour or more with Mr. and Mrs. Elmore, had a brief interview with Polly, and then went away, and the last seen of him as he went he was still swinging his eye-glasses round and round.

And so this mysterious case rested.

That it was a mysterious case, no one could deny; and it was mysterious in more ways than one. Where was Maud? Who was the strange "Mrs. Smith"? What was the secret held back by Mrs. Elmore and her husband? What—but we pause. All these things remained to be explained, and the one destined to lift the veil was—Broadway Billy, the Bootblack Bravo.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHADOWING A SHADOWER.

"SWEET pertaters, cart-wheels, tom cats, tin-cans an' firecrackers!"

This went to indicate that Broadway Billy was laboring under some great mental excitement.

And he was.

He was just returning to Broadway, having been home, to his new home, to get his lunch and see how his mother was making out in starting a new series as it were in the line of housekeeping.

While there he had asked her if she had seen Polly Osmond since the fire.

She had not, of course, nor had she seen Mrs. Osmond. And then she went on to tell him, for the first time, about Polly's going away on the previous afternoon.

We need not repeat their conversation on the subject, but will see what Billy had to say about it in soliloquy.

"It beats 'em all!" he added to his rather prolix exclamation. "Wonder where she's gone to so sudden? Strange she didn't even say she was goin'. Guess I ain't as solid with Polly as I thought I was. Hang me if I don't begin ter feel a mighty strong interest in Polly, an' all th' more since seein' that other gal yesterday. Wonder who she was? There's one way ter find out, I s'pose, an' that is ter lay low fer that dude at th' bank that knocked me over yesterday. Lordy! but that was a bad one on me. I must square th' count somehow. Why, I'd be eternally disgraced if that should reach th' ears of Inspector Br— Hellos! stranger, d'ye want a shine?"

Billy had just come out upon Broadway, and was turning toward the post-office, when he was accosted by a stranger.

The stranger was a short, dark man, who was twirling his eye-glasses around and around in his left-hand fingers.

We have seen him before.

As Billy put the question he unslung his box, a new one, and prepared for business.

The stranger shook his head, though, and continuing to twirl his glasses, asked:

"My lad, is your name William Weston? and are you the boy who is known as 'Broadway Billy'?"

"Ye've hit th' bull's-eye th' first shot," Billy declared. "Who be you?"

"My name is Jones."

"Jones is a good name. I once owned a dog named Jones, an' the name was *too* good fer him. Th' dog wasn't worth shucks. Mebby ye wanted ter see me, though, stranger."

"Yes, I have been looking for you. I would like to ask you a few questions."

"All right, Jonesy, old boy, fire away."

The detective—of course the reader has recognized him—had to smile in spite of himself.

"I believe you lived at No. — Centre street where the fire was last night, did you not?"

"If you'd seen me a-gittin' out o' there about two o'clock g. m., stranger, I reckon ye'd 'a' thought so! Lordy! it was a close squeeze, you bet! Why I—Mebby you'd like ter ax me somethin' more, though."

"Did there live a woman in that house named Mrs. Osmond?"

"Sure pop!" Billy exclaimed, now interested.

"And had she a daughter named Polly?"

"She had, fer a fact."

"Have you seen either of them since the fire?"

"No, sir, not a sign o' em."

"Do you know where they went?"

"No, sir, I don't. Say, though, what's all these questions about? Be you lookin' fer Polly Osmond?"

"Yes, I am."

"And so am I."

"Perhaps I can tell you something about her that you do not know."

"Mebby ye can."

"Do you know that a woman called for her yesterday afternoon and took her away in a carriage?"

"Oh! that's old. I knowed that."

"But you do not know where she went to, do you?"

"Of course not. Didn't I jest say I was lookin' fer her?"

"Yes, and I said the same. I was not in earnest though. I have *found* her."

"Sweet pertaters! then what be ye tryin' ter pump me fer p'ints fer?"

"I want to know if you would recognize the girl if you were to meet her."

"Say, d'ye think I'm blind in one eye an' can't see out o' t'other? Why, I'd know Polly among a thousand!"

"Then of course you can recognize her photograph."

"Cert."

"Well, here it is. See if it is she."

"Hold on jest a brief second till I orate," said Billy, pushing the photograph away. "In this great world o' ours there's nothin' so mighty unsartain as sartain things that *are* unsartain. That's logic, which ain't good ter eat, nor yet a patent medicine; but another name fer hoss sense. Now if ye'd axed me at this same hour yesterday if I could tell Polly Osmond by a photo, I'd 'a' been willin' to vow that I *could*. As things is now, however, I ain't so sure of it."

"Ah! how is that?"

"Why, yesterday afternoon I met another girl who looked so much like Polly that I couldn't tell which was who. I spoke to her an' called her Polly, an'— Well, I found out my mistake. It wasn't Polly at all."

"And you think it may be the same with the photograph, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, take a look at the photograph now, and tell me which you think it is."

The photograph was one of Maud Elmore, and one recently taken.

Billy took it and examined it with critical eye, and then said:

"Well, now, mister, ter tell ye th' truth, it stumps me. With these duds on, though, I should say it wasn't Polly, but t'other one."

"You are right."

"Oh! I am, eh? Then I reckon you know who this gal is."

"I do."

"An' I reckon also that ye'd like ter ax me another conundrum or two. Be I right?"

"You are."

"Then, as th' fake over in th' dime museum would say, list' to th' oracle. Not a single word more d'ye git out o' me till ye tell me who this gal is. I don't know who you be, but I find ye're after information as big as a hoss, an' I want some, too."

While speaking thus, Billy adjusted his box upon his shoulder as though ready to end the interview then and there.

"What do you want to know that for?" the detective asked.

"Sweet pertaters! ter satisfy my devourin' curiosity, of course. An' that ain't all I want ter know, either."

"What else would you like to know?"

"I want to know where Polly Osmond is now."

"And you mean to say that if I don't give you this information you will not answer any more questions, eh?"

"Just so."

"Well, then, my boy, you're left."

"Left? how am I left?"

"I have got all the information out of you that I wanted, for which I am very much obliged, too; but

I can't give you any in return. It isn't in my line of business."

"Th' dickens it ain't! What is your line o' business, anyhow?"

For reply the detective threw open his coat just far enough to let the boy catch a glimpse of his shield.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy ejaculated, "you don't mean ter say ye're a detective, do ye?"

The detective smiled.

"That is what I am," he said. "I wanted to learn whether such a girl as Polly Osmond had lived in that old Centre street tenement. I went there and found it burned down. I made inquiries concerning people who had lived there. You, for some reason or other, seemed to be the best known of any one who had lived there. I found that you were a Broadway bootblack. I got a little fellow from that neighborhood to come over here and point you out, and you have given me all the information. Again thanking you, I will be going."

"Then ye won't tell me where Polly is?"

"It wouldn't be business-like for me to do so."

"Then, as I said afore, list' to th' oracle: I'm goin' inter this case, Mr. Defective, soin' inter it neck an' ears; an' if I don't git there it'll be 'cause it ain't in th' wood. I wouldn't be so mean as you be, not fer bullion. You're too mean ter live long. After I answered all yer questions, an' merely axed ye two little ones myself, ye won't tell me what I want ter know. I'd 'a' been willin' ter work shares with ye on th' case, but now I won't do it. I'm goin' it alone now, an' I'll bet you git left. With my compliments, now, ye kin go to thunder." And Billy wheeled about and walked away in high indignation.

The detective stood and gazed after him for a moment, still swinging his eye-glasses, and perhaps debating with himself whether he had treated the boy fairly or not, and then he turned and went up the street.

And after him went a "shadow."

It was a shadow in fact, as perhaps Billy would have assured, for it was none other than his little friend "Skinny."

Billy and Skinny understood each other perfectly, and they had a number of private signals by which to communicate with each other in cases of emergency, or when they were on different sides of the noisy street.

While in conversation with the detective, Billy had noticed Skinny approaching, and had at once signaled him not to come up.

These signals were all given by means of their bootblack boxes, and the position in which they were held, and could be made under the most watchful eye without creating a shadow of suspicion.

The detective was no more aware of what Billy was doing than he was of what was going on at that moment in the city of Washington.

And as Billy turned away from the detective, his last signal to Skinny was—"keep him in sight and find where he goes to."

"All right," was the signal in reply, and Skinny started after him as shown.

The detective went at once to the Elmore residence.

His first move had been to ascertain whether Polly's story was true, or whether the old doctor was right in his theory.

He now brought proof that the doctor was wrong, that Polly had told the truth, and that a certain suspicion entertained by Mr. and Mrs. Elmore was undoubtedly correct.

Skinny did not lose sight of his man until he entered the house, and then having done all his partner had required of him, he gave up the trail and returned down-town.

When he found Billy he reported the result of his work.

"You'll be a detective yet, Skinny," Billy declared, earnestly. "I've got strong hopes fer ye, an' I'm a thousand times obliged to ye fer yer help in this case. You're a genuine shadow, an' no mistake. I hope ter see ye chief o' police some day. Long life to ye, Skinny, an' may yer shadow never grow less. If it does ye're a goner, sure."

When it was about time for the banks to close for the day, Billy made his way down to the one in which his "boodle" was deposited.

He had at least two objects in view.

One was, to black the boots of his new customer, Mr. Jonas Herman, and the other, to get an interview, if possible, with the cashier of the bank.

Mr. Herman soon came out, and Billy was on hand at the steps to meet him, box and brushes ready.

"Shine!" he shouted, to attract the attention of the president, who had evidently forgotten all about his contract with the boy.

"Oh! it is you, eh?" the gentleman exclaimed, as he looked around. "Upon my word, my lad, I had forgotten our agreement."

"Lucky fer me that I didn't, then," Billy declared, "or I'd got left, sure. How is biz?"

"Jest what I thought myself. Say, though, how's yer cashier? Has he showed any indications o' longin' fer a cooler clime? Has th' fever begun to get hold o' him? That's a complaint that has ter be nipped in its first stage, Mr. Herman, or it takes th' victim off without warnin'."

Just then the cashier came out.

CHAPTER IX.

BILLY MEANS BUSINESS.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy mentally exclaimed, "speak of th' Old Nick an' he's bound ter show up. R-ckon I'm in fer bein' exposed as a double-dyed loafer, now, sure. Guess I kin stand it though. Truth is mighty, as th' poic says, an' all in good time my character will shine forth like th' electric light on a foggy night, dispellin' th' shadvers o' doubt like th' risin' sun dispels. Anyhow, that's th' way it goes in th' story-books—or words to that effect. But, let's hear what his dudeship has got ter say. Let 'er go, Gallagher!"

"What! Mr. Herman," the young cashier cried, "do you allow such a young ruffian as this to black your boots?"

"Oh! is it you, Melvin?"

"Yes, sir."

"Our young friend here was just speaking about you, indirectly. He was inquiring if my cashier had any symptoms of the Canadian fever. Quite a joke, eh? Ha, ha, ha!"

Had Mr. Herman looked at his cashier at that instant, he would have been seriously in doubt whether it was a joke or not. But he was looking down at Billy to see how he would take it, now that he was face to face with the cashier.

Billy, though, glanced up at Melvin at just the right moment, and saw him turn as pale as death for one brief instant.

"But," Mr. Herman added, "why do you call the boy a young ruffian?"

He now looked at the cashier, but the paleness had gone as quickly as it had come, and he saw nothing of it. In fact, the fellow was smiling.

Billy had just given the finishing touch to his task, and he rose up.

"Because he is such!" the cashier declared. "He grossly insulted a young lady yesterday afternoon, a most estimable young lady—in fact, none other than Miss Maud Elmore, my affianced bride; and I had the pleasure of knocking him down as he deserved."

Mr. Herman looked at Billy, and the boy had his reply ready.

"That's one side o' th' story," he said. "Now I'll give ye t'other. Th' young lady was passin' by here, an' I mistook her for somebody else, an' spoke to her. Didn't say one word that was insultin'. I simply made a mistake in th' party, an' that was all. Th' lady got huffy, though, an' then this spider-legged dude rushed out an' hit me a clip when I wasn't lookin' fer it. He can't do it ag'in, though, an' I'mbettin' rocks on it!"

The cashier was purple with rage at being called such a name, and looked as though he would like to try it again, but the dignity of his position would not allow it.

"You had better be careful what you say," he warned, "or I will have you arrested. You are too smart. Your long tongue will get you into trouble yet."

"Lordy! it's done that lots o' times. It's got me out o' trouble a heap more times, though, an' I guess it's good fer a few times more."

"It won't be, if you don't take care how you use it, I can tell you."

"I've got an idee it's my own," Billy retorted, "an' I reckon I'll use it as I please."

The cashier turned his back upon the boy and addressed himself to Mr. Herman.

"What I have told you, sir, is true," he declared, "and I have just received word that Miss Elmore is seriously ill—in fact, has lost her reason. I have no doubt the shock this boy gave her yesterday has somet ing to do with it. If I find it has—Well, let him look out. I will bid you good-afternoon, sir."

"Good-afternoon, Melvin. I hope you will find Miss Elmore better. I cannot believe the boy meant any harm."

The cashier walked away then, and in a moment more so did the president.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy exclaimed, "but this is rich! This is more'n I hoped for. Didn't know hardly how ter go about gettin' this information, an' hang me if th' dude didn't come right up an' give it to me. He's a hoss, he is a hoss's tail! I'm layin' fer him, I bet! If I kin give him a back-hander, I'll be th' happiest boy in New York. Sweet pertaters! but it is rich. That gal's name, it seems, is Maud Elmore, an' now I'll bet a dime that I'm on the right trail. But, let's see; two an' two makes four, don't it? I've got some addin' ter do, I reckon. I must add 'Miss Maud Elmore' to that address Skinny gev me, an' see what'll be th' sum total. But, how'm I ter do it? Lordy! I wish I had more brain an' less chin, mebby I'd be good fer somethin'. I must dust around, now, an' do somethin' that's sure, or I'll lose th' confidence o' Inspector Br—Ah! here's an idee, an' I'll grab it while it's hot!"

Going at once into a store where he was known he asked permission to look at the city Directory.

Permission gived, he opened the book at "E" and looked for "Elmore."

That name was soon found, and then running his finger down the list he looked for the address furnished him by Skinny as the place where he had housed the detective.

To his great joy he soon found it, and the name in the preceding column was—"St. John Elmore."

Making careful mental note of the name, the boy returned thanks for the use of the book and went out.

"Sweet pertaters, ham-bones, sky-rockets an' sunflowers!" he exclaimed, "but I'm on th' right trail, sure as guns! Oh! how I'd like ter find out jest what case that detective is workin' at, an' have th' luck ter take th' prize out o' his hands! Hang me if I don't b-gin ter believe there is a little bit o' detective genius about me somewhere, an' if I could only locate it, put on a poultice an' draw it to a head, I believe I'd be a reg'lar Pinkerton. Now I'm goin' inter this case th' hull hog or nothin'. I'll git right up an' show Inspector Br—Hello! here's Skinny, jest th' lad I want ter see.

"Hey! Fatty, wh're ye goin'?"

"Hello! Billy, is that you?"

"Guess it is."

"It looks like ye, anyhow. Say, I was jest comin' ter find ye."

"An' I was jest goin' ter look fer you. What d'ye want o' me?"

"I've got a p'inter fer ye."

"Ye have? What is it?"

"Ye remember that feller that knocked ye down yesterday, d'nt ye?"

"Well, I should say so! I seen him only a few minutes ago, too."

"Did ye?"

"Yes."

"Where did you see him?"

"He was up th' street a ways. But, who d'ye s'pose he was talkin' to?"

"Give it up. I ain't worth a cent at riddles."

"Why, he was talkin' to that enemy o' yours, that feller ye was tellin' me ye had th' scrimmage with last night."

"Not Ab. Hawk?"

"That's th' bird."

"Sweet pertaters! Skinny, I kin tell ye some things in this garden o' posies is growin' so fast they're runnin' ter seed. I'm gettin' mighty interested in this case now, even if I have got hold o' th' wrong end first."

"An' what was you a-comin' ter look fer me for?"

Skinny inquired.

"Why, I want ye ter take my reg'lar customers off o' my hands fer a day or so. I'm goin' inter this case th' hull hog or nothin'. Will ye do it?"

"Yes, of course I will; ain't we pards?"

"Yes, an' I'm proud of ye, too. If ye wasn't so awful fat ye'd be more bootiful ter look at, but I'm satisfied with ye. Now here's a card with all my customers' names on, and ye'll see there's only six more ter do ter-day." And Billy went on to give full directions.

"All right," said Skinny. "I grip yer idee, an' I'll tend ter biz in a way that'll do our company credit."

"Haven't th' least doubt of it, pardner," Billy answered, and bidding his friend good-by he started for home.

"So," he muttered, "Ab. Hawk was talkin' to that cashier feller, was he? Wonder what is up with them? It looks like funny biz. Wonder if it has anything ter do with his tryin' ter take my bank-book last night?"

When he reached home he put on his best clothes at once, took a hasty lunch from the closet, and telling his mother where he was going, set out.

When he reached the street a new surprise awaited him.

A carriage was just drawing up to the curb a short distance away, and Abner Hawk was advancing to meet it.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy exclaimed at once, "here is still another quill in th' wing. Wonder what this means?"

There was no possible chance for him to get near enough unobserved to hear what was said, but he could see all that passed.

The carriage was a closed one, and when Abner Hawk reached it, its door swung open just a little.

Some little conversation was carried on in a low tone, evidently, and then Hawk put out his hand and reciev-ed something which he at once put into his pocket.

Then a moment later the carriage drove away, and Hawk turned and entered the saloon where he spent a great deal of his time.

All in an instant Broadway Billy resolved to follow that carriage.

But, how was he to do it? It had started off at a lively gait, and there was not a vehicle in sight that he could possibly hire.

Knowing well that there was no time to be lost in debating the question, he set out on a run to follow it on foot.

Straight up Centre street to Canal the carriage went, thence to Broadway, and then up that great thoroughfare.

Billy was not a great ways behind when Broadway was reached, but his wind was nearly spent, and it was a great relief to him when he saw the carriage turn up town, and saw also a street car right at hand going in the same direction.

He boarded the car at once.

For some distance the carriage held the lead, but after two or three awkward blockings had been encountered, the driver of it turned his horse aside and allowed the car to pass, when he fell behind it.

Seeing this move about to be made, Billy stepped inside the car in order not to be seen.

Not that he had any idea the driver of the carriage would know him, but if he should see him again later on he might suspect that he was watching him.

Up Broadway to Fourteenth street the carriage went, and then it turned to the left.

A moment later and Billy was again following it on foot.

Down to Sixth avenue he was led, and then northward again.

Here, too, Billy was able to take a car.

Quite a distance was traveled in this way, and then, when a very fashionable part of the city was reached, the carriage turned into one of the numbered streets in the direction of Fifth avenue.

To Billy's surprise and delight he found that this was the street on which St. John Elmore resided.

Again the boy followed, at a safe distance, but this time he had not far to go.

The carriage soon stopped before a house, a woman got out and went in, and then the carriage drove away.

Billy took note of the number of the house, and then again he followed the carriage. He thought it might possibly bring him further light.

But in this he was mistaken. The driver went straight to a stable in another street, and horse and carriage disappeared.

"That seems ter settle that p'int," Billy decided. "Guess th' trail ended back there at th' house where th' woman got out. Reckon I'll toddle back to th' neighborhood o' that vicinity now, an' see how th' land lays. It's queer how strange it is, b'mighty! but that's th' same street St. John Elmore lives on. There's a nigger in th' fence, sure pop. This heur pot o' mystery is beginnin' ter b'ile. An' I'm on hand ter poke up th' fire an' keep it b'ilin', too. I want ter git in ahead o' that reg'lar detective, if I kin, an' show Inspector Br—Hello! here's th' street! Now fer it."

Billy soon found the house he had seen the woman enter, and took a careful survey of its front. But it told him nothing. Then he went on to the Elmore residence, which he noted was six doors from the other house, and there, after a moment's hesitation, he rang the bell.

CHAPTER X.

MAUD ELMORE MYSTIFIED.

It is not by any means our intention to forget Miss Maud Elmore.

When she awoke, on the morning following the night of her abduction from her own room and home, it was a little later than the hour in which Polly Osmond awoke.

The sun was shining into her room, and she, of course, had no thought that anything unusual had been going on during the night.

The room was hers—in appearance, and there was nothing whatever to create alarm and suspicion in the girl's mind.

Lying awake for some moments, enjoying the refreshing rest so natural to youth and health, she presently arose and called for her maid.

There was no answer.

She called again, and as there was still no reply, she stepped to the door opening into the bath-room, and leading to the room her maid occupied.

To her surprise that door was locked.

What could it mean?

Then for the first time she noticed that she was not in her usual night attire.

She was astounded.

Quickly she turned to the door leading into the hall.

That, too, was locked.

Then she turned to the windows and looked out, and—Good heavens! where was she? This was not her own room! The house across the street was not the one opposite her own room. Where could she be?

And yet, this room must be hers. It was the same in all respects—color, furniture, pictures—everything.

Stepping quickly to the wardrobe, Maud flung open the door.

It was empty.

Heavens! had anything been stolen?

She turned then to the bureau and threw open the drawer in which she kept all her jewelry.

Not a thing was there.

Surprised and frightened beyond measure, the girl burst into tears.

"Oh! what has happened—where can I be?" she sobbed. "This is my room, and yet nothing outside seems natural. The houses all seem to have changed places, and—Ah! there is the one that is opposite my own room!"

So it was.

It was the fifth or sixth house further down the street.

All this took place in less time than it has taken us to pen the words.

Maud was naturally brave, and after the first shock of surprise and dismay was over she dried her eyes and began to try to reason.

She had but merely parted the lace curtains to look out, fearing she might be seen, and she now turned back into the room.

"Where were her clothes? Had nothing been left whatever?"

She looked around, and on a chair near the head of the bed she espied the clothes which had been worn by Polly Osmond.

She examined them.

They were of common material, but were neatly made and scrupulously clean, and she resolved to put them on—and did.

She was now Polly Osmond, as any one who had ever known Polly would have declared instantly.

Having dressed herself, she stepped back to the window and drew the curtains aside boldly.

Why—oh! why—was she treated thus? Whose house was she in? Wh-n had she been brought there? For what purpose?

These were questions she could not answer, not one of them.

It was all a mystery to her.

Had she been ill? What day was this? Was she not in her own room aft' r all? Had not the changes across the way actually taken place?

She could not tell.

Suddenly she was struck with an idea, and hastened to test it.

On the inside of the wardrobe door she and a schoolmate, who had spnt one summer vacation with her, had written their names.

She would see if they were there.

Quickly she crossed again to the wardrobe, threw open the doors, and looked where she knew the names to be.

They were *not* there.

This, then, was proof positive that she was not at home. Where was she?

Once more she tried the doors, but they were as unyielding as were the windows.

She returned to the window and once more looked out.

Then she endeavored to guess the number of the house she was in.

Taking the house which she knew was opposite her own home as the starting point, she went over the numbers as she knew they ran, and soon decided the question.

Then, she asked herself, who resided at this number?

She knew not.

Back into the room she turned, fear, dread, despair almost overpowering her.

It was somethng she could not understand.

Only last night, it seemed, she had retired to bed in her own room, well and happy. Her rings had then been on her fingers and her earrings in her ears. Now she wore a small ring which she had never seen before, and a pair of earrings of a very cheap kind, comparatively. How had the change been effected without her waking? And who had made the change?

The more she tried to solve the mystery the more of a mystery it became.

Could it be that she was alone in the house? She had not heard a sound from any other room.

She would call for help.

"Help! help!" she cried, as loudly as she could, and then listened.

Soon steps were heard ascending the stairs, and then the key turned in the lock and the door opened.

A most ill-favored and brutal-looking Irish woman appeared.

"Phat d'yez want?" she demanded harshly.

"I want to know where I am," Maud replied haughtily.

"An' phere d'yez think' yez are, I'd loike ter know? Afther bein' here these four years an' more, an' then ter ax where yez are. Go long wid ye."

"I have been here four years!" Maud gasped, "oh! what do you mean?"

"I'm ane jist phat I say."

"That I have been here *four years*?"

"Jist so."

"And where am I? Oh! tell me, or I shall go mad."

"Oh! yez make me tired. Haven't I tould yez for th' thousand-like-times where yez are? Ye're in th' sylum."

"I am in an asylum! Oh! my God! I surely have not been mad."

"Haven't yez, then! Sorry a madder wan do I ever want anything to do wid. Sure, but yo're loike a wildcat, so yez are, when ye git onto a rampage."

"Oh! I cannot believe it!" Maud cried. "Tell me, oh! tell me if this is true!"

"True! av coorse it's true! There—there, now, don't be goin' on loike that, or yez'll be goin' off."

"Where is this house?" the girl next asked. "In what place is it? on what street?"

"Sure, it's No. —, — street!"

This was an untruth, to express it mildly, as Maud well knew.

"You speak falsely!" the girl cried. "This is No. —, — street. It is not within a mile of the street you mention."

"Sure, an' how did yez guess that?"

"Things that are so clearly evident do not have to be guessed at."

"Oh! but you're th' crazy one, you are! Sure it isn't a sane word ye have uttered these four years ago! Would ye loike ter have yer breakfast?"

"I want nothing, except to be released from this room and allowed to return home at once. What you tell me, is false. I am no more insane than you are."

"Th' same old story is that, me darlint. It won't go down wid me. I knows ye too well. Why, half o' th' time ye're as crazy as a bedbug."

"Oh! how can you say that, when you know it is false?"

"But I tell ye it's *true*."

"Do you know who I am?"

"Av coorse I do."

"Who am I?"

"Who are ye? Oh! but yez do weary me wid yer questions, so ye do, an' th' same ones over an' over ag'in every day. That's de use me answerin' 'em? Sure yer memory isn't as long as a string, an' ter-morrow ye'll be axin' th' same things over ag'in."

Maud did not believe this, and how could she? but at the same time she could not control her feeling of fear and dread. What if it were true? Could it be?

"I know well enough who I am," she said.

"Then why did yez ax me?"

"I wanted to see if you know."

"An' I told ye av coorse I do."

"I am Miss Maud Elmore."

"Oh! good heavens! an' phat next will it be? Yesterday ye was de Princess o' Wales, an' I s'pose ter-morrer ye'll be de Empress o' Bag-dad, or some other furrin blood."

"Then please tell me who I am. I will not trouble you again."

"Sure an' I'll not l'ave yez trouble me ag'in, fer dis is de last time. I'll tell yez, now mind ye. Yer name is Polly Osmond, jest no more an' no less, an' ye kin rest assured, me darlint, that all th' 'noble' blood there is in yer hull body wouldn't fill a tay-spoon. An' now I ax yer ag'in—will yez have yer breakfast?"

The game that was being played is easily understood.

It was the intention of the strange woman who was at the bottom of the evil plot to make Maud believe that she was insane, or at least to disturb her mind so greatly that she would drive her mad.

It was a heinous scheme.

But she had in Maud Elmore a girl who would prove hard to manage.

Already Maud was trying to form some plan of escape, but none as yet appeared.

She thought of attempting to bribe the Irish-woman, but a moment's reflection caused her to decide against it. She would try every other means first.

"Is it really true—what you tell me?" she asked.

"Av coorse it is! An' now let's have no more av it. D'yez want yer breakfast?"

"Yes," Maud answered, sinking down upon a chair as though spirit-broken, "you may bring my breakfast."

"An' yez belave all I've told yez?"

"Yes, yes, it must be so."

"Indade it is so, an' ye'd better take it as aisy as ye kin. You an' me allus gits along good when you're disposed ter be r'asonable, an' I hope ye'll behave yersel'. I'll be back in a minnit now wid yer grub."

So saying, the woman went out and locked the door after her.

"Oh! what can this mean?" the poor girl questioned. "Whose house is this? and why have I been brought here? When was I brought here? Oh! this uncertainty is terrible. And that brutal woman says I am mad, and that I have been here four years— Oh! 'tis false, 'tis false! I am not a child, to be made to believe anything. But, I must escape, or I shall become mad. How, though, am I to do it? I must plan some means, and that before this day passes.

"And the name she gave me— 'Polly,' I have heard it— Oh! I remember now; it was what that rude boy called me yesterday on Broadway. What can be the mystery of all this?"

In a short time the Irishwoman returned with a breakfast for the fair prisoner.

Maud ate it, having resolved to keep up her strength and spirits as well as possible, and then she set about planning her escape.

The hours dragged slowly. Dinner-time came, and her dinner was brought. Then the Irishwoman spent an hour or two with her. After that she was alone again, and spent the minutes in thinking—thinking.

At last she was rewarded. A plan of escape suggested itself.

CHAPTER XI.

A SURPRISE FOR BILLY.

"SWEET PERTATERS! I've put my foot inter it now, fer sure!"

Such was Broadway Billy's mental exclamation the moment he had rung the bell at the Elmore residence.

"What in th' merry old dickens be I goin' ter say when this here portal is swung open? Oh! if I only had a little brain! I wonder what *is* in my thick head anyhow? Hang me if I don't begin ter think it must be mush an' milk. It ain't very strong, anyhow. Th' idee o' me comin' here an' pullin' th' jigger without knowin' what I want or what I'm goin' ter say. Lordy! if I wasn't 'fraid they'd see me, anyhow I believe I'd run. Great cats! if this reaches th' ears of Inspector Br— Hello! somebody's comin', an' now fer it!"

The door swung open, and a colored man-servant appeared.

He was a dignified-looking old darky, and Billy foresaw storms in the near future.

"What yo' want?" the servant asked.

"Well, uncle," Billy exclaimed, "I'll be hanged if I know what I *do* want. Mebby you kin help me out, if you buckle yer mind right down to it. S'pose ye give it a turn, while I think. Say-er—who lives here when th' house is ter home?"

"Dis am de residence ob Mistah St. John Elmore," with great dignity.

"That's it! That's jest th' gooseberry! I knowed I could git a start if you helped me a little. Ye see I'm no hand at holdin' my grip onto high-toned names. Is th' gentleman ter home?"

"Mistah Elmore?"

"Cert."

"No; he am out."

"Hum! Seems ter me I don't progress like I generally do. There seems ter be a dark shadder in th' way. Wonder how I'm ter dispose of said shadder, an' explore th' regions beyond? Hang me if I ain't about stumped. Sweet pertaters! if this is ever told ter Inspector Br—"

"What am yo' talkin' bout?" the old darky interrupted.

"Hello! you're there yet, ain't you!" Billy ex-

claimed. "I was just ruminatin'. Ye see, uncle, I'm here on mighty p'tic'lar business, an' I don't want ter make so false moves. I b'lieve ye said th' boss was out."

"Yes, Mistah St. John Elmore am out."

"Well, mebbe Mrs. Elmore is ter home."

"No; she went out, too."

"Don't seem ter git ahead worth a cent, do I. Wonder if dynamite would have any effect on shadders—specially black shadders! I dyna(but I)mitte be tempted ter try it, if I had a can of th' stuff handy. One thing is sure, I've dyn-a-mite poor stroke o' work this time, an' if Inspector Br— Hello! don't faint, uncle; I've got another poser fer ye."

"See heah, boy! am you tryin' ter make fun at me? Ef you am—"

"Really, now, I didn't think of ye," said the boy, instantly, with a dejected air. "I hadn't the least idea, uncle, that you'd turn on me like that. Make fun of ye? never! By th' great Stars an' Stripes, never!"

"Den what you wants, anyhow?"

"Well, I'm tryin' ter find out if there's *anybody* ter home here. Th' famby cat will do, I s'pose, if ye can't scare up anybody else. Say, though, is Miss Elmore in."

"Yes, she am at home."

"Bully! she's th' gal fer me! I want ter see Miss Elmore! I want ter see her bad, too. Lordy! you've got me so excited an' worked up that I'd be willin' ter see my great granddad."

"But Miss Elmore am sick."

"I know it, uncle, I know it jest as well as you do. I want ter see her, though, jest th' same."

"Have yo' a card?" with a great drawl on the "a."

"Sweet pertaters! no! Have I a 'kyaaard?' Great ginger blue! I'm no dude, uncle, I'm simply Broadway Billy, th— Hello! now I've done it, sure. I wish ye wouldn't crowd me so, uncle, ye make my tongue go faster'n my thinkin'-machine."

Truth was, Billy was at loss for an excuse for asking to see Miss Elmore, and he almost wished the old darky would shut the door in his face.

That, however, was not likely to happen until his errand was made known.

Suddenly an idea struck him, and he laid hold of it at once.

The old darky was smiling, he could not help it; and after a momentary pause, he asked:

"What shall I tell de missy, den?"

"There!" Billy exclaimed, "now you're gettin' down ter biz. Hy didn't ye straighten me out this way ter begin with? I told ye at th' start-off that I wanted ye ter h'lp me out. Now we're gettin' down ter biz. In th' first place, is Miss Elmore's loveyer here? I mean that dude of a Melvin."

This tickled the old darky so that he laughed outright.

He did not like Maurice Melvin any too well, and it pleased him to hear this boy call him a dude.

"He, he, he!" he laughed. "No, he am not heah," he said.

"Then is there a feller here that has a trick o' swingin' his eye-glasses? A sort o' smart-Ellick—thinks he knows it all, an' some o' th' next book, too."

"No, no, he am not heah. I knows who you means, but he am not heah. De missy am all alone, 'cept her maid, I reckon."

"Well, now, uncle, you jest inform her that a boy about my size an' figger is here an' wants ter see her. Tell her it's 'tic'lar, an' I must see her alone."

"All right. Step inside an' wait a minute."

Billy obeyed, and the old darky closed the door at once, and then went up-stairs.

Going at once to Miss Elmore's room, he knocked, and the door was opened by the maid.

"D'e're am a boy down-stairs who says he wants ter see Missy Maud at once," the old man explained.

The maid repeated this to Polly, who was seated near the window.

"Oh! I do not want to see him!" Polly exclaimed

Elmore's room, the old darky knocked, the door opened, the maid invited Billy to step in, the boy did so, and the door closed behind him.

Billy stood alone in the presence of the supposed Miss Elmore and her maid.

Polly could hardly resist the temptation to jump up and make herself known at once, but she waited to see what Billy would say.

For a moment Billy stood silent, turning his hat around in his hands, and then he said:

"Er—Miss—I—I'm here."

Polly smiled and nodded, and could hardly restrain her laughter.

"I thought I wouldn't be, though," Billy declared, "when that black shadder fell across th' door down there. Bein' as I am here, though, I—er—Say, I s'pose ye reckernize me, don't ye?"

Polly nodded again.

"I had an idee ye would. Ye see, miss, I happened ter git holt o' yer name an' address, an' thought I'd come round an' pollygize fer th' way I spoke to ye yesterday on Broadway. Ye see th' fact was, miss, I mistook ye fer somebody else, a gal that I'm awful sweet on. Her name is Polly, an' that's th' reason I called you Polly. Why, she looks jest as much like ye, miss, as two square lumps o' sugar looks alike. It would be jest onpossible ter tell who from t'other one, if ye stood side an' side. I'm th' sort o' feller, miss, what wouldn't speak 'sultin' to a la y fer a mint o' gold, an' I hope ye'll 'cept my pollygy as it's meant. As fur that spider-legged dude o' yours that knocked me down, I—"

Polly could hold in no longer, but burst out in a merry peal of laughter in which Miss Elmore's maid joined her.

Billy looked from one to the other in amazement.

He remembered, now, to have heard Maurice Melvin tell Mr. Herman that Maud Elmore had lost her reason, and this seemed to him to indicate that she had. He certainly had not said anything funny; it wasn't in him.

A moment later he was more astounded than ever.

As soon as Polly could control her laughter she sprung up, ran to where the boy stood, caught him by the hands, and exclaimed:

"Why, Billy, don't you know me—Polly?"

Billy stood and stared at her with eyes and mouth open wide.

Again Polly laughed.

"Now see here," Billy finally managed to say, "if you think I'm goin' ter allow ye ter monkey with my feelin's an' affections in this style, ye're mistaken. Yesterday when I called ye Polly, ye got huffy an' looked daggers an' dynamite at me; an' now, when I come ter pollygize to ye, ye call me Billy, an' declare you're Polly. Now I'd like ter know jest who is who. If you're Polly, where's Miss Elmore? an' if you're Miss Elmore, then where's Polly?"

"I am Polly," the girl answered truthfully.

"Where Miss Elmore is nobody knows. This is Miss Elmore's maid. Am I not speaking the truth?"

turning to the maid.

"Yes," was the answer, "this is true."

"But, sweet pertaters! how did you come here, if you're Polly? an' what are ye passin' yerself off as Miss Elmore for? There's a mystery here as big as a hoss, an' hang me if I wouldn't like ter understand it. Say, jest shed a little light on th' subject, will ye?"

"I am willing to tell you all I know," Polly answered, "but that isn't much. I do not know how I came here any more than you do. All I know is that when I went to bed last night I was plain Polly Osmond, but this morning when I woke up I found myself Maud Elmore. Her rings were on my fingers and her earrings were in my ears, just as you see them now. And the real Maud Elmore has disappeared."

"Sweet pertaters! This is a mystery! Hang me if I—. Say, though, if you're Polly, I want ye ter prove it to me. The appearance o' things ain't satisfactory. This is a case where I can't pend on my eyes. I'm ruther inclined ter believe you are Polly, but I want proof of it."

"And what proof can I give you?"

"Well, I'll tell ye: If you're th' real an' sure enough Polly, you'll remember a little agreement ye made with me once upon a time, an' if you'll jest whisper inter my ear what that 'greement was, it'll settle th' hull question."

Polly blushed like a rose, and seeing that Billy was thoroughly in earnest, she gave him the proof he demanded.

"That settles it!" Billy cried joyously; "an' now, Polly, I'd like ter see ye alone fer about ten minutes or so. Will this lady be so kind as ter—"

"Yes," said the maid, promptly and pleasantly, "she will. I will retire into my own room."

And she retired at once, leaving Billy and Polly alone together.

CHAPTER XII.

BILLY GETS A CLEW.

"SWEET PERTATERS! Polly," Billy exclaimed, the moment they were alone, "but this case beats all I ever got holt of. I've had my hand inter several detective mysteries durin' my brief career to date, but this one is th' daddy of'em all. It is somethin' I can't see through, nohow. Now, Pol, jest tell me all ye know about it, will ye? I may be able ter pick up a pint as we go along."

Polly complied. She told him everything, as far as she knew it, from the time of her leaving the old tenement in company with Mrs. Smith, up to that time.

And when she had done, Billy cried:

"Polly, there's a stupendous mystery here! It beats any case on record, an' I'mbettin' rocks on it."

"It certainly is a very strange affair. It is something I cannot understand at all."

"Did ye ever have a suspicion, Polly?"

"Did I ever have what?"

"A suspicion; one o' them idees ye git that sich an' sich things is so an' so, an' so forth. F'rinstance, you—"

"You mean suspicion."

"Cert, an' that's what I said. Did ye ever have one of 'em meanderin' through yer brain?"

"Oh, yes, many a time."

"Well, I've got a suspicion now."

"You have?"

"You bet I have; an' I've captured it, too."

"What is it?"

"Well, it's a suspicion that your name ain't Polly Osmond no more'n mine is."

"Oh! how can you think that?"

"It's easy enough ter think so, when ye git th' suspicion inter yer head an' can't git it out."

"But, Billy, you know my name is Polly Osmond. Haven't we lived in the same house for ever so long?"

"Oh! that part of it is all straight; but did it ever occur ter you that Mrs. Osmond might not be yer mother?"

"Heavens! no, I never had such a thought in my life!"

"Well, I've got it, then, an' I've got it bad, too."

"It can be easily settled, though, Billy. You can ask my mother—Mrs. Osmond—as soon as you return home."

"Sweet pertaters! you hain't heard th' news, have ye?"

"No," and the girl turned pale; "what news?"

"Why, th' old tenement was burned clean to th' ground last night."

"Oh! good heavens! Billy, are you in earnest about it? And my mother—was she hurt? Was she killed?"

"No, she got out all safe an' sound, an' then she disappeared. Nobody has seen a sign of her since."

"Oh! what can it mean? and where can she be?"

"Give it up."

"I must go and search for her at once. Oh! what if she is ill?"

"Now, see here, Polly, don't fret yourself. She's all right, of that ye kin be sure. She knows where you are, an' if she wants ye she kin send fer ye."

"What makes you suspect she is . . . of my mother, though?"

"Well, sev'ral things. In th' first place, she sent ye off in a mighty hurry with a woman she'd never seen before, don't ye think so?"

Polly began to reflect.

Some things did seem rather strange, as she looked them over.

"Besides," added Billy, "how is it ye look so much like this Maud Elmore?"

"Why, I'm sure I cannot tell."

"Well, that's another suspicion I've got in my pumpkin. No two folks is made so near alike jest fer fun, an'— But, my stay here may be cut short any minute, an' I reckon I'd better talk biz while I've got th' chance."

"Yes, if you have anything private to say, you had better say it now."

"Korrect. Well, in th' first place, then, has that detective been here to question ye?"

"Really, I do not know. There was a gentleman here, a—"

"That's him, I'll bet! One of these awful smart (in their own mind) sort o' fellers, wasn't he? an' kept his eye-glasses turnin' round and round, like this," imitating.

"Yes, yes, that's him."

"I thought so. I've been takin' his measure. I had an interview with him this mornin'. He thinks he's awful cute, an' I'd jest give a dollar ter take this job out o' his hands. What's he doin', anyhow? lookin' up Miss Elmore?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Well, what did he ask you?"

"He wanted to know what kind of a carriage I was brought here in, and—"

"What kind was it?" Billy interrupted. "Was it a square, closed carriage, somethin' like a doctor's rig, only bigger?"

"That is it exactly! How did you know? Have you seen it?"

"Reckon I have, Polly. But go on, an' let's hear what else ye've got ter say."

"Well, then he wanted me to describe the driver—"

"Could ye do it?"

"No; I have forgotten how he looked."

"Wasn't he a big man, with pale face an' red whiskers?"

"Oh, so he was!"

"Well, what next?"

"Then he wanted me to describe Mrs. Smith, and I did so as near as I could. Then he wanted me to tell just how far and in what direction I was taken from the Centre street tenement. And he asked me if I could tell the street and number when the carriage stopped."

"Sweet pertaters! didn't he want the earth? I had an idee it was a detective's business ter find out sich things fer theirselves. Well, could you tell him all he wanted ter know?"

"No, I couldn't. I couldn't tell him hardly anything. It was a long ride, I know, but the carriage was closed and I couldn't see out, and when I got out I had a thick vail over my face and couldn't see much. I took one quiet look around, though, and I am pretty sure this is the stree' where we stopped. The houses look like the ones I saw."

"Did ye tell th' detective that?"

"Yes, I told him that."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, he went right on asking more questions. You see I didn't see the number of the house when I went in, and he tried hard to make me think of something about its appearance that I could describe it by."

"And could you?"

"No, not a thing, then; but I have thought of something since, and I have also proved to my own satisfaction that it was not this house."

"Bully! this begins ter sound like real old biz. Hain't mentioned this ter nobody else, have ye?"

"No."

"Good! What is yer clew?"

"Why, I remember that the very first step leading up to that house had a big crack across it, so"—indicating on the window-sill—"and I've looked out at the steps of this house, and they are all whole."

"Sweet pertaters! Polly, you're a trump! I bet now I kin git th' bulge on this here mysterious mystery an' sift th' hull thing out. I'm goin' right in ter win now, if I have ter spend my whole boodle ter do it. When this detective gits holt o' me, I've got ter give right up an' turn myself inter a reg'lar Pinkerton. Guess I must 'a' been born so."

"After all the experience you have had, I believe you will be a detective some day, Billy."

"Mebby I will, Polly, if I don't die. They say th' good 'most allus dies young, ye know."

"So I've heard. I guess you need have no fears, though."

"Thank ye—for nothin'. Say, though, I want ter ax a favor of ye, Pol."

"Well, what is it?"

"It is jest this: I don't want ye ter mention this little clew about th' crack in th' step to anybody, an' most 'specially that detective feller. Will ye promise?"

"To be sure I will. I will be dumb as a cabbage if you want me to."

"All right. Don't give that feller any more p'ints than he's got already. It might not be safe fer him to overload his brain, an' he's got all that's good fer him now."

"Very well, not another item will he get, then. I really would like to see you beat him."

"Well, that's jest what ye will see, if it's in th' wood. I'm a terror on springs when I git wound up, an' I'm aimin' ter win th' confidence of Inspector Br—Hello! do my eyes deceive me? Gosh ter mighty! no! Sweet pertaters! if here don't come that spider-legged dude who is engaged ter be married to Miss Elmore. Git onto his airs, will you. Ain't he a lu-lah? Great toothpicks an' darnin'-needles! he's comin' here ter see you, too! Here's a purity state o' things, as they sing in th' Mikkydoo. What's ter be did? Is there any place 'round here where I kin hide?"

"Heavens!" Polly gasped, "you don't mean to say he is Miss Elmore's lover, do you, and that he is coming here? Oh! what in the world am I to say to him?"

"That's him, Polly, sure as guns: an' he's comin' here, too. He's heard that you have lost your reason, an' no doubt he's comin' ter sympathize with ye. As ter what ye'r ter say to him—Lordy! it is th' best chance I ever seen in my life ter have some fun. You kin jest let on that ye're as crazy as a bedbug, an' make him wish he'd been born a howling Hottentot. Oh! let him come up, by all means; an' then give it to him hot an' strong an' right an' left. Call him a dude. Tell him he's n. g. Tell him ye had a dream that he's tryin' ter swindle th' bank. Tell him—Hello! there he is at th' tinkler now. Where'll I hide?"

Maurice Melvin it was, and he had just rung the bell.

"Get into the wardrobe there," Polly quickly directed. "There is plenty of room, and you can leave the doors open a little."

"Jest th' place," Billy agreed, and in a moment more he was within the wardrobe and out of sight.

Polly then called the maid.

"Did you call me?" the maid asked, as she came in.

"Yes; Miss Elmore's lover is coming, and I suppose I must see him."

"Where is the boy?"

"He is hidin' in the wardrobe. He has met Mr. Melvin, and does not care to be seen."

"And what do you want me to do?"

"Then please take my card up to Miss Elmore, and say that I beg to be allowed to see her."

The old servant took the card, carried it up, and soon returned and informed Mr. Melvin that Miss Elmore would see him.

CHAPTER XIII.

A HOPELESS CASE.

Maurice Melvin was soon ushered into "Miss Elmore's" presence.

"My dear Maud," he exclaimed, rushing toward Polly with outstretched hands, "what cruel news is this they tell me of, my darling?" and he seized her hand and covered it with kisses.

"Give it up," Polly answered shortly, as she drew her hand away.

The young cashier drew back a step, and an expression of pain crossed his face.

"My darling," he said, "do you not know me?"

"Guess not," Polly answered. "Your phiz don't seem very familiar."

The young man almost groaned.

"My dear, dear Maud," he implored, "do you not recognize me? Have you so soon forgotten your promise of last night? Do you not remember my placing that ring upon your finger? Oh! my darling, what has happened?"

Broadway Billy, in his place of hiding, could hardly keep still. He would have given ten dollars to be able to take Polly's place for about ten minutes.

"What are you talking about, anyhow?" demanded Polly. "Are you crazy? I never saw you before, and I don't know who you are."

"Oh! mon ami, I—"

"What are you giving me now?" Polly demanded.

"Is it hog Latin? If it is, you'd better cut it short. I don't speak anything but U. S., which means Uncle Sam."

Melvin was paralyzed, but Broadway Billy was elated. He, the latter, felt like shouting.

As for the maid, she could hardly help laughing.

"Good heavens!" the young cashier gasped, "this is horrible. How long has she been so?" turning to the maid.

"Since this morning, sir," the maid replied.

"And what does the doctor say?"

"He says too much reading has turned her brain."

"Look here!" exclaimed Polly, "if you came here to see me, sir, I want you to confine your attention to me. I allow no one to flirt with my maid, and most certainly not in my very presence. You have no manners, sir."

"But, my dear, I—"

"Don't you call me your dear, you silly dude! or I'll have you put out of the house."

"Oh! this is dreadful—terrible!"

"It isn't half so dreadful and terrible as it will be. Say, what brought you here anyhow? You sent up word that you wanted to see me, and now what do you want to see me for? If you have anything to say, out with it."

The young man's position was decidedly embarrassing, and he knew not what to say or do.

"Oh! Miss Elmore," he said, "I am so sorry to find you thus. It pains me more than I can express. I heard you were ill, and I have come to see you. This is my errand. Oh! my darling, if you could only recognize me; if—"

"There, now, chop right off," Polly interrupted. "You make me tired. I'm sure I didn't send for you, did I? And I'm no more ill than you are. It seems to me you take a great deal of interest in me for a stranger, and—"

"A stranger! Oh! this is too much—too much."

"That's about what I begin to think myself," Polly declared. "Say, who are you anyhow?"

"Who am I? Oh! she asks me who I am—I, who am—or was—to become her husband. Oh! this is dreadful. Who am I? I am Maurice Melvin, cashier of the — bank. Do you not remember that you promised to become my wife?"

"Your wife! ha, ha, ha! Oh! but that is rich! Why, you skinny-legged dude! I wouldn't be seen out with you."

Melvin was more than paralyzed. He was knocked silly. His face grew red, he twisted his mustache nervously, and backed away toward the door.

The maid was fairly stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth to hold back her laughter, and Broadway Billy could hardly resist the temptation to pounce out of the wardrobe and dance a breakdown.

Polly, to Billy's mind, was doing well, though he wished she had his tongue.

And Polly herself could hardly keep her face straight.

"I—I will be going," the cashier gasped. "I will call again. I—"

"Oh! you needn't put yourself out of the way to do it!" Polly exclaimed. "I have no great desire to see you again. I couldn't place much faith in a cashier of a bank, anyhow. I'd be afraid you'd gobble the boodle and flit to Canada."

It must be borne in mind that Polly was the child of a Centre street tenement, and this manner of talking was something she was used to hearing. Naturally, her own language was quite grammatical, but she was now playing a part.

Maurice Melvin's face turned ashen pale, and for an instant he caught hold of a chair to steady himself.

Broadway Billy noticed this.

"Sweet pertaters!" the boy mentally exclaimed. "This is th' second time that feller ha' been knocked out o' time by the mention o' th' words 'boodle,' an' 'Canada.' Hang me up fer a dead herrin' if I don't believe he has been liftin' th' funds o' that

bank, an' I'm jest goin' ter keep my eye onter him. My own boodle is at stake, an' th' man that gits away with that has got ter git up purty soon in th' mornin'. Yes, sir-ee! I've got my north eye on ye, Mr. Melvin, an' I'm goin' ter keep it there, too."

"Do you feel worse?" Polly asked, as she, too, noted the casuier's sudden paleness.

Melvin turned to the maid and said:

"When Mr. and Mrs. Elmore return, please inform them that I have called, and that I am deeply pained at Miss Elmore's sad misfortune. Tell them I will call again to express my sympathy."

"Yes, sir," the maid responded.

At that moment there came a knock at the door. The maid opened it, and the doctor entered.

He and Melvin had met before.

"Ah! I am glad to see you!" the latter exclaimed. "I desire your opinion in this case. Miss Elmore, you know, is my affianced bride."

"Indeed! I had not heard of it. Well, I will give you my opinion presently. I must speak to the young lady."

These remarks had been spoken in a low tone, but they were plainly heard by all present.

"Well, my dear Miss Elmore, and how are you now?" the doctor inquired.

"What! am I your dear, too?" Polly exclaimed. "Wonder if anybody else will come along and claim me for his dear. A dear old fellow you are, you're almost as fat as that dude is thin."

The doctor shook his head.

"Don't you know me?" he asked.

"Know you? of course not. Do you suppose I know every dude and fat man in the city? I wish you would both go away and leave me. I am about setting out for Paris in company with Lord Everleigh, and I am sure the bride will prove to be the heir to the estate."

Polly had declared herself fond of reading, and this went to show that she was not unacquainted with the popular "English" literature of the day.

The old doctor shook his head again, and more ominously than before.

"Bad case, bad case," he muttered.

"You're shouting!" exclaimed Polly. And then she burst into a merry peal of laughter. She could hold it back no longer.

The doctor prepared another quieting potion, which he gave to the maid, with directions how to administer it to the patient, and then he and Melvin left the room.

"What is your opinion?" Melvin asked.

"I fear it is a hopeless case," the doctor answered.

"And what has caused this sudden and alarming change in the heretofore charming and witty girl?"

"Too much reading. Didn't you notice what she said about Paris, lords and estates? She's crammed her head so full of such nonsense that it has turned her brain."

"And you have little hope?"

"I may say, sir, that I consider it an almost hopeless case. I fear her mind is wrecked forever."

"Then, of course, my fondest hope—that of making her my wife—can never be realized."

"I should say not, sir. In fact, I may say it looks like an utter impossibility."

The future for Maurice Melvin looked dark, and it was with downcast spirits that he followed the old doctor from the house.

Meanwhile, no sooner had the pair left Miss Elmore's room than Broadway Billy sprung out of the wardrobe, and catching hold of the corners of his coat he essayed a waltz around the room.

"Sweet pertaters, ginger snaps, kerosene an' fishhooks!" he presently exclaimed, "but this takes th' pie! Polly, shake. I'm proud of ye. Lordy! wouldn't I like ter been in yer place fer jest two minutes an' sixty-five seconds! If I wouldn't 'a' made his hair curl. You did bully, though, an' I tell ye I'm proud of ye. Ye're th' best bit o' feminine beauty on this hull great island, an' that's sayin' a good deal, too. Oh! but this was jest rich!"

Polly and the maid were both laughing heartily, and the maid having locked the door, they could give way to their feelings of mirth without reserve.

The maid, we may mention here, had long since been won over from the doctor's idea and converted to the truth of the case.

"Wasn't he cut up, though, when I called him a dude?" remarked Polly.

"Yes; and didn't he get red when you mentioned skinny legs," the maid added.

"An' when ye hit him on th' question o' bank funds an' Canada," put in Billy, "didn't he weaken. Hang me if I don't believe he's crooked. That same feller, an' if he is I'll do my best ter straighten him out, you bet! But, I must be goin'. It'll soon be night. Has th' doctor an' th' dude gone out yet?"

"Yes, there they go now," answered the maid, pointing down to the street.

"All right. Soon's they git out o' sight, I'll strike out. Now, Polly, you keep right on playin' crazy, and don't ye give away anything ter that detective feller. An' you, miss," to the maid, "you be a good gal an' take care o' Polly, an' if I don't bring back Miss Elmore it'll be 'cause she ain't ter be got hold of."

"Oh! I will do that, you may be sure," the maid promised.

"All right; an' now I'm off."

Bidding the girls good-by, Billy left the room and descended the stairs to the hall, where he was met by the old darky.

"Well, lad, how you done make out?" the old servant inquired.

"Poor enough, uncle, poor enough," Billy replied.

"That gal is as crazy as a bedbug."

"So she am, lad, so she am," the old man agreed sorrowfully. "Poor missy! hit am too bad—too bad."

"Cheer up, though, Unc, she may come out all right," and with these words the boy made his exit from the house.

Walking leisurely, he went in the direction of the house where he had seen the carriage stop a short time previously.

When he came to that house he walked close to the steps, taking particular notice of them.

And he was rewarded.

The first step had a crack in it exactly as Polly had described.

Billy passed right on, but as soon as he reached the avenue and turned out of the street, he exclaimed:

"Sweet pertaters! this case is growin'! It'll soon be a full blown mystery, an' no mistake. An' I've got th' bulge on it, too; an' if I don't git thar ahead o' that reg'lar detective, my name ain't Sweet William."

CHAPTER XIV.

BILLY IN BONDAGE.

BROADWAY BILLY was somewhat at loss to know what move to make next.

He presently decided, though.

He would go home, get his supper, and then perhaps let the matter rest quietly till morning.

The latter he did not fully decide upon, but he set out for home at once.

He had little fear that the detective would get ahead of him, with Polly on his side, and really he did not see what more he could do that day toward setting the matter straight.

Perhaps if he dreamed upon the case he would see his way clear. At any rate he wanted his supper.

Going to Broadway he boarded a down-town car, getting off at the street leading over to Centre street at the point nearest his new home.

"Yes sir-ee," he agreed with himself as he walked across toward home, "this is a case worth talkin' about. It's about as strange a one as I ever got onto. Hang me if I kin quite grasp th' facts yet. Let's see how she stands, anyhow."

"In th' first place, if it hadn't been fer my boodle down there in th' bank I wouldn't stumbled onto th' game at all. That boodle o' mine seems ter be a burden on my mind even if it ain't one on my conscience. An' as things looks jest now, it don't seem ter be any too secure. I must keep my eye onter that cash-r feller, sure."

"But, I'm gittin' off th' track. I was standin' in front o' that bank, sort o' sizin' up its caliber as it were, when a gal kem along that I thought was Polly. Seems it wasn't. Out kem that pipe-leg dude an' knocked me over. That put me ag'in him, right from g-o-go! Then I went home an' found it wasn't Polly. This set me ter thinkin', an' I made up my mind ter find out who t'other gal is. An' I'm gettin' there, too."

"Then kem all these other freaks o' queerness inter th' case, an' it would puzzle th' brain o' old Solomon ter sift 'em out. Who is that Mrs. Smith? What did she take Polly away fer? How did she git her into th' Elmore house an' git Miss Elmore out? I wonder where Miss Elmore is? Ten ter one she's in that house with th' cracked step in front. If so, is she safe? or is she in danger an'—Sweet-pertaters! why didn't I think o' this afore? Who knows but her life is in danger? Lordy! but this case mustn't be allowed ter sleep now. Soon's I git my supper I'll sally up to th' Elmore ranch ag'in an' jest make Rome howl. This is a purty piece of fergetfulness, this is, an' if it reaches th' ears o' Inspector Br—" Thud!

A heavy blow fell upon the boy's head, and he was knocked senseless to the ground.

"There! you young whelp!" muttered the man who had dealt the blow, "see how that will fit yer head. You've got too much curiosity fer a boy of yer age an' size. Come, Bill, lend a hand, an' we'll tote him off."

The speaker was Broadway Billy's enemy, Abner Hawk.

He had evidently been lying in waiting for the boy for just the purpose he had accomplished.

The place was just in front of an old and unused warehouse, not far from Centre's reet.

Hawk and his companion had concealed themselves behind a pile of old rubbish, which encroached upon the sidewalk, and just as Billy was passing, Hawk reached out and struck him with a piece of lead pipe.

There were plenty of people in sight, but it was growing dark, and the deed was done so quickly that no one noticed it.

The two men picked the boy up at once, and carried him on to Centre street, and then in the direction of the saloon where Hawk made his headquarters.

Before they had gone far they were stopped by a policeman.

"What have you here?" he demanded,

"He's my boy," answered the one called Bill. "He fell off o' the truck a spell ago, an' hurt his head."

"Where are you taking him to?"

"We're takin' him to the saloon ahead there. I've sent fer a doctor, an' soon's he come's I'll take th' boy on home."

"Oh! all right, I thought you might be up to some rascally work."

"Oh! us—not us!"

then they entered another house directly in the rear of it.

It was an old house, and seemingly deserted, and in an almost tumble-down condition.

Once inside the house, they carried the boy upstairs and into a dark and foul-smelling room.

Here they laid him down.

"Fires! but that was a narrow squeeze with th' blue-coat!" exclaimed Bill.

"You're right it was!" agreed Hawk. "It had th' appearance of a difficulty at first."

"It had, fer a fact. What's ter be done with th' lad now?"

"I'll show ye that in short order," Hawk declared.

"I intend ter fix him so's he won't be lookin' his nose where he's got no business ter poke it. I tell ye Bill, I know this lad well, and it's a honest fact that I'd a heap ruther have one o' Byrnes's reg'lar detectives on my track nor have him. He's a terror!"

"Th' deuce! ye don't mean ter say ye'd be 'fraid o' a boy, do ye?"

"Not in many cases I wouldn't, but when that boy is Broadway Billy, I'd a heap ruther have the small-pox after me."

"Well, ye've got th' best o' him now, anyhow."

"Yes, an' I mean to keep the best o' him, too."

"Ye don't mean ter kill him, do ye?"

"No, oh, no! not that. I'm not runnin' my head inter a rope, thank ye. I'm goin' ter keep him a prisoner, though, till—well, as long as th' boss wants him kept."

"An' who's th' boss?"

"That cashier feller I told ye about. Ye see I've sort o' got a grip onto him, an' when he wants any dirty work done, he comes ter me. He pays good, too. Reckon he must lift th' spare cash out o' th' safe once in a while. That's nothin' ter me, though. Ye see he's got a wife an' child in a flat up-town, an' now he's tryin' ter marry another gal."

Little they imagined Broadway Billy was coming to, and that he was taking in all they said.

"And you're goin' ter let him go it, eh?" queried Bill.

"You bet I am! He'll rake in a pile o' cash by th' move, an' then you bet I'll come in fer a share."

"Th' gal is rich, eh?"

"I should say so!"

"An' th' wife?"

"Oh! she's pretty but poor. Ye see she was a little actress, an' he took a fancy to her an' married her."

"An' now he wants ter git out o' it, eh?"

"No, I guess he likes her, but ye see he's got into a hole, or at least that's th' way I take it, an' he wants ter marry t'other one to git money."

"Oh! I see. Well, come, we must tie this lad, fer he'll soon be comin' to..."

Billy staggered to his feet.

"Ye needn't trouble yourselves," he said, "but jest open that door an' let me out o' here, double quick."

Hawk had lighted a candle while talking, and by its light they could see around.

"When you git out o' here ye'll know it," Hawk declared. "I reckon I hold th' best hand in th' game now, young feller."

Billy's strength and spirits were returning with every second that passed. His courage he never lost, so that was with him in full power.

"Ye may think ye do," he retorted, "but don't be too sartain. There's nothin' in this world so mighty uncertain as certain things that is onsartain. You want ter take mighty good care that another stick o' timber don't fall onto yer head an' knock ye silly."

"There, that'll do, my bantam," said Hawk, as he advanced, "if ye don't shut up I'll knock ye down. Come, Bill, an' we'll make him safe."

"Stand back!" Billy ordered, "or it'll be th' worst fer ye! I've got a can o' dynamite in my pocket, an' if I let it drive at ye ye'll dy-n-a-mi-te hurry, you bet! Stand back, I say!"

The two men advanced upon him, however, and despite all his struggles, he was securely bound, hands and feet.

"There!" said Hawk, "I reckon you'll stay here, won't ye?"

"Ye don't want ter bet very heavy on it," Billy answered.

"Oh! I guess it's a dead sure thing. There's no possible chance fer ye ter git away. I won't gag ye, 'cause ye kin holler jest es much as ye like. Nobody kin hear ye, an' if they do they won't trouble their heads about ye. If ye want to test yer lungs it'll be a good chance fer ye ter do it."

"All right," Billy returned, as cheerfully as possible. "I make an awful howl when I do let 'er loose though, I kin tell ye. Say, though, how long am I ter stay here?"

"Till I get ready to let ye out."

"Thank ye fer th' information."

"You're welcome to it."

Making sure that the boy was indeed securely bound, the two men threw him upon a heap of straw in one corner and let him lie.

Then blowing out the light they went out, locked the door, and retreated from the house.

"Sweet pertaters, gum-drops, earthquakes an' fish-horns!" Billy exclaimed, when left alone; "if this don't clime th' capmax! Here's my plans all knocked end-ways, an' me in a sort o' consarned diffikilt. Wonder what that feller hit me with? Lordy! but it did knock me silly, an' no mistake. Now, how'm I ter git out o' here? Got ter do it somehow, that's mighty sure."

The first thing he did, naturally, was to try his bonds.

These he found secure beyond a possible hope of breaking or loosening them.

Nor had he any means of cutting them.

"Begins ter look as if I would have ter stay here, an' no mistake," he complained. "It serves me right, though. Meby after I git killed a couple o' times or so I'll git some sense."

Billy blamed himself for every ill that happened to befall him as though he could foresee and ought to know better than run into danger.

When he found that it was impossible for him to get free, he threw himself back upon the straw and began to think, trying to plan some means by which to get out of his dilemma.

But no plan presented itself, and at last he fell asleep.

When he awoke it was daylight, and the light came pouring in through one of the windows where one of the heavy, solid shutters was broken at the top.

With an exclamation he sat up and looked around his prison.

It was a dismal, dreary-looking room, and the only article of furniture it contained was an old table.

On this stood the candle that had been used on the previous night.

While Billy was looking around he heard steps ascending the stairs, and in a moment more the door of the room opened and Abner Hawk entered.

He carried a plate, on which were a piece of bread and some meat.

"Hello! You're up, are you?" he exclaimed.

"How did you sleep?"

"First-rate," Billy responded. "What ye got there—somethin' to eat?"

"Yes," Hawk answered, as he placed the plate on the table, and then he drew a revolver from his pocket.

His next move was to free the boy's hands and assist him to stand up, his feet being still tied.

"Now," he said, "eat, and let us have no monkey business, or I will shoot you."

And Billy, being hungry, did eat.

While he was eating, Hawk's comrade of the previous night came in, and when he had done, they freed his feet long enough for him to move around at liberty for a few minutes. Then they bound him securely again and left him alone.

CHAPTER XV. FROM BAD TO WORSE.

At a reasonably early hour that morning, the detective called at the Elmore residence.

He had a clew, he said, and hoped that within a few days at most he would be able to clear the mystery up.

He was looking for Mrs. Osmond.

If he could find her, he felt sure that he could get such information as would lead to the finding of Maud and the exposure of the whole plot.

Mr. and Mrs. Elmore were filled with alarm and anxiety for their daughter's safety. The mother, never in the best of health, was almost prostrated with grief.

Both were very kind to Polly Osmond, and she had every comfort.

The doctor, too, called again, and Polly entertained him with conversation of the most insane and imaginary kind.

It was of no use holding out false hopes, the worthy doctor declared. He feared the poor girl's mind was permanently weakened, and advised Mr. Elmore to place her at once in an asylum. She might, he said, become violent at any time, and not only do injury to herself, but to others.

Maurice Melvin called while the doctor was there, but he did not go up to see Maud, and made great show of grief when told the sad news—that there was little or no hope for the girl's recovery.

He went away greatly troubled in mind, though his heart was not greatly disturbed.

Polly and the maid spent their time in Miss Elmore's sitting-room.

Polly was anxious and thoughtful.

The news that the old Centre street tenement had been burned, that her mother could not be found, and Billy's expression of doubt as to whether she really was her mother, gave her plenty of food for thought.

Polly and the maid had grown to like each other, and their hours together were pleasant to both.

But we must return to Maud Elmore, since the interest of our story demands that we do so.

We left her elated by the hope that she had found the means of escape.

We will now explain what her plan was.

As we have described it, her room had two doors. One of these opened into the hall and the other into the bath-room.

Over the door of the bath-room was a transom, too narrow to admit of any one's climbing through, but wide enough to admit air and light to the bath-room.

This transom was open—in fact it was destitute of glass.

Of course Miss Elmore had no idea or hope of being able to get through this transom, but taking it in connection with another discovery she had made, she hoped to make it the means of her escape.

The door of the bath-room was locked.

The key was in the lock, on the outside from Maud's room.

The lock was of peculiar make, and the key protruded through it about a quarter of an inch.

By experiment Maud found that she could turn the key, but of course it was impossible to turn it far enough to operate the lock. She could only turn it where it was free.

After puzzling her brain for some time she hit upon the idea that gave her hope.

If she had a string to drop down over the transom, and could secure it to the key by means of a loop, then she might be able to push the key out of the lock, draw it over the transom by means of the string, and then unlock the door and make her escape.

She was hopeful instantly.

When she came to search for a string, though, none was to be found.

She searched thoroughly, here, there and everywhere, but no string, thread nor anything else could she find.

This was a damper to her hopes, but she did not give up the idea.

When the Irishwoman came up with her supper, Maud asked:

"Well, how have I behaved myself to-day? Have I given you any annoyance?"

"Faith, but it's a darlin' ye've been th' day, sure," was the reply. "If ye'll only behave so well every day, my swate one, I'm sure we'll get along."

"I shall try to do so."

"That's right."

"What is your name?" Maud next asked.

"Me name? sure it's jest simply Ann McDoolahan."

"Then I will call you Ann, if I may."

"Certainly, darlin', call me that."

"Well, Ann, you have a kindly face," (with a mental prayer for forgiveness for the falsehood), "and I have a favor to ask of you."

"Now, darlin', I—"

"Oh! it is a very simple one, I assure you."

"Well, what is it?"

"It is this: I am so awfully lonesome here that I would like to have some sewing to do to pass away the time. Can you not procure me some?"

"Oh! is that all yez wants? Sure, then ye shall have it instanter."

The woman went out, soon returning with a small work-basket.

Here, thanks to her own clever scheme, Maud found thread in plenty, and her hopes grew bright again.

Son, however, they were dashed to the ground.

"I'll open th' ba'n-room fer yez," the woman said.

"an' then if yez will ye kin take a bath."

"Oh! no, you need not do that!" Maud quickly cried; "I do not care to take a bath."

"I must do it anyhow," the Irishwoman insisted; it's th' missus's orders, sure."

"And who is your mistress?" Maud asked, hoping by a quick question to draw out some information.

The woman was not to be caught.

"Sure, she's th' missus of th' 'sylum," she answered, adding:

"Now, pl'aze don't begin wid yer questions, darlin', or we won't git along fri'ndly at all at all."

"Very well, I will not trouble you."

"That's a sensible child. An' now I'll go around an' open th' door. Sure th' kay is a blessed nuisance, so it is, fer it won't go inter th' lock only on th' one side."

Going out into the hall, and thence around, the woman entered the bath-room from the opposite side, and threw open the door.

"There ye are," she cried, "an' now ye kin bathe or not, jest as ye loike."

Having opened the door and spoken these words, the woman retreated, and Maud heard her lock and bolt the other door upon the outside.

Her chance was gone.

The woman then came around and took away the supper things, and again the girl was left alone.

What was she to do? How could she escape?

The thought haunted her constantly.

That night passed slowly, and slower still dragged the next day. And night came on again.

We may add here that the day dragged as tardily for Broadway Billy, in his dismal prison, and the coming on of night found him still in the toils.

There was not enough light admitted through the transom to enable the girl to see the key, but as her eyes became accustomed to the darkness, she was able to see the white knob of the door.

Taking a long thread in both hands, she dropped it over and down, and then tried to catch its double end under the key.

It presently caught, but after a careful test, the girl decided that she had got hold of the knob instead of the key.

Letting fall one end, she drew the thread clear and tried again.

And at last she was rewarded.

The thread caught again, and this time the moving of the key told her that it had caught the right object.

Making a running knot, taking care to make it a secure one, the girl drew the thread up slowly until one end of it was securely fastened to the key.

Then she got down from the table, and after an effort or two, succeeded in pushing the key out of the lock.

Victory! The thread held it, and in a moment more Maud had it in her hands.

Then suddenly came the recollection of something the Irishwoman had said, and the victory was instantly overthrown by despair.

The woman had said the key would not go into the lock from that side.

Maud quickly tried it and found this to be true.

How was it she had not remembered this? Where could her thoughts have been? So great was her disappointment that she sat down and wept.

Presently, though, a new idea caused her to leap quickly to her feet.

Might this key not fit the other door, if she could only get out the key that was then in the lock? She would try it.

Crossing the room quickly, she glanced at the lock of that door, and one glance told her that both locks were alike.

With fast-beating heart, she took hold of the end of the key in the lock, turned it until she found it was free, and then with the other key pushed it from its place.

It fell without a sound upon a mat.

The next instant Maud had tried the key she held, and, to her great joy, it not only went into the key-hole, but it unlocked the lock.

No time now was to be lost, and quickly putting on the hat and wrap belonging to Polly Osmond, Maud turned out the light and went from the room.

Closing the door after her, she felt for and found the key, and then locked the door as it had been.

She had put the table back into its place, and arranged the room in order, and now came the desire to return the key of the bath-room door to its place and thus make her escape a mystery, provided she did escape.

She resolved to do it.

Going down the hall, she soon came to another door. This she opened silently, and was surprised to find a dim light within. She entered cautiously, and there in the bed lay her jailer—the Irishwoman, snoring musically.

Maud crossed the room as silently as a shadow, entered the bath-room, put the key into the lock, and then as silently retreated.

When she regained the hall she drew a long breath of relief, and then hastily but noiselessly descended the stairs.

In a moment she was at the front door. Feeling carefully, she soon found the key and the bolts, and then a moment later she stepped out and closed the door softly behind her.

Without pausing an instant she ran down the steps, and—she ran right into the arms of Abner Hawk and his partner Bill.

CHAPTER XVI.

BRAVO! BILLY, BRAVO!

"SWEET pertaters! it 'most makes my flesh creep. my hair stand on end an' my blood run cold ter think of it, but it's got ter be did."

Broadway Billy, of course.

It was night again. Billy had had his supper and his few minutes of freedom, and was now once more lying upon the heap of straw, securely bound.

In fact, he had been lying there for some time since supper, if so miserable a portion could be called a supper, for it was now after eleven o'clock.

All day long, and all the evening, too, he had been racking his brain for some plan by which to escape, and at last he had hit upon an idea.

To judge from his exclamative declaration above, though it must have been something entirely new and modestly startling in its character.

And the latter it was beyond dispute.

"What a blessin' it must be ter have brains," the boy muttered. "Wish somebody'd take a squirt-gum an' inject a pint or so inter my ears. I'd like ter know how it feels when a feller has brains in his head instead o' water. Here I've been a prisoner fer nigh onter thirty hours, I reckon, an' this idee has jest forced itself inter my thick head. Oh! I wish somebody'd put long ears onto me an' turn me out to grass. Why, if th' fact that I'm sich a lunk-head ever reached th' ears o' Inspector Br—Hello! what th' deuce is broke loose now?"

Heavy feet were heard on the stairs, and Billy's quick ears detected what he took to be the sound of a woman trying to scream.

"Sweet pertaters!" the boy exclaimed, as he managed to sit up, "here's another horn to th' dilemmer, sure's guns. If that ain't a shemale in some sort o' difficulty, then my ears ain't in tune. Wonder who it kin be? Lordy! if I kin only make this new skeem o' mine work I'll find out what's goin' on. I bet!"

The heavy steps reached and passed the door of

the room Billy was in, and then he heard them enter another room.

"There!" came the voice of Abner Hawk. "now ye kin kick all ye want ter, my beauty. I'd take that hankercher out o' yer purty mouth, if I thought ye wouldn't holler like all tarnation; but I know ye would, so I'll have ter leave it jest where it is. Here, Bill, jest tie her feet."

A moment of silence followed.

The words had not been spoken loudly, and had Billy's ears not been remarkably sharp, he would not have caught them.

Hawk soon spoke again.

"Now, I guess ye won't get away," he said. "I'm sorry ter leave ye, an' I wouldn't if I hadn't important business on hand, but it can't be helped. I'll see ye later, though, my pretty Polly, and then we'll see about gettin' married."

"Sweet pertaters, lampblack, carpet-tacks an' sourkraut!" Broadway Billy ejaculated, "kin that be Polly Osmond?" If it is, then by th' great sea-serpent I've got ter git out o' here if it takes both legs an' an arm to do it. At first I thought th' idee I had was a scorchin', but now it's nothin'. I'd burn my head off fer Polly."

The reader, of course, understands that this girl was Maud Elmore.

When she ran down the steps in her hasty flight from the house where she had been imprisoned, and ran right into the arms of Abner Hawk and his comrade, Hawk caught hold of her and exclaimed:

"Polly Osmond, by all that's truthful!"

"You mistake, sir!" Maud cried. "Release me at once!"

"Oh! no I don't!" Hawk retorted. "I know ye too well."

As he spoke he clapped his hand over her mouth, caught her arms, and then said hastily to his companion:

"Come, Bill, into th' cab with her! We'll let t'other job go fer to-night."

A cab was standing a short distance away, and picking the girl up the two evil rascals bore her to it, put her in and drove away.

And they drove to Centre street, stopped near the saloon, and when their driver gave them the signal that no one was near, they got out hastily and carried the girl into the saloon and on into the old house in the rear.

Hawk's errand up-town, in company with his partner Bill, had been to break into and rob the house where lived the woman who had taken Polly Osmond from her home.

It will be remembered that this woman had transacted some sort of business with Hawk on the day when Broadway Billy followed her home, and on that occasion Hawk managed to get her address, and he resolved to rob her house.

When Hawk concluded to return to the scene of which our chapter treats, Billy heard him and his comrade leave the room and lock the door after them.

The next moment they entered his room.

The instant the boy heard them pause at his door he threw himself back upon the straw, turned his face to the wall, and began to snore.

"Oh! he's all ri ht," he heard Bill mutter. "How d'y'e s'pose he could git away?"

"He ain't very likely ter git away, that's so; but he's a boy that can't be watched too close. Come, though, it's gettin' on to midnight."

They left the room, and again Billy sat up and gave vent to his feelings.

"Sweet pertaters!" he exclaimed, "ye're right he needs watchin'. He ain't goin' to stay here long now, you bet!"

Billy's p'an of escape was based upon the idea of fire.

The candle was on the table, unlighted, and near it, as Billy had noticed, lay several matches.

It was the boy's intention to light the candle, if possible, and then hold his wrists over the flame and burn away the cords that held him a prisoner.

Waiting until the two men had been gone some minutes he got upon his feet, and then by wriggling along, moving less than an inch at every attempt, he finally reached the table.

His hands were tied behind his back, but he could move them a little, and placing his back to the table he began to feel for the candle.

He first found the matches.

He took up two or three of these, and after several attempts, managed to light one.

Then he discovered that the candle was on the opposite side of the table.

Moving around to it, inch by inch, he finally got hold of it, and then lighting another match he had the good fortune to light the candle with it.

This done, he placed the candle on the floor, and then sat down and held his feet over its flame.

This was an easy task, as he could see just where to let the flame play, and in a few minutes his feet were free.

Then came the task of freeing his hands.

Moving around, he sat down with his back to the candle and placed his wrists over the flame.

He jerked them away again quickly.

"Sweet pertaters!" he exclaimed, but that's hot! Guess I'll have ter give it up, an'— What! Billy—Billy o' Broadway give up? Nixey. I'll do it if it takes off both hands. What! leave my Polly in that feller's power? Well, I reckon not! Billy, put yer hands over there, an' don't squirm once."

Shutting his teeth hard, the boy again put his hands over the flame and held them there.

Instantly his flesh began to blister and burn, and his arms and face twitched with the pain. Tears rolled down his cheeks, but not a sound escaped his lips.

Steadily, for full half a minute, he endured this,

and then he felt the cords give way. The next moment his hands were free.

"Sweet pertaters!" he gasped, as he drew his hands around to look at his burns, "but that was awful! Great ginger! see how I'm burnt! Hang me if I ain't most cooked! Polly, ye kin jest bet yer boots that ye've got ter pay fer these burns with kisses. No', if I could show Inspector Br— But, come, no time ter chin. These here burns hurts powerful much, but I've got ter grin an' bear it an' git right down ter biz. I'll take one look around, ter see how I'm ter git out o' here, an' then I must put out th' light. It won't do ter be caught."

There was a small, square window opening out into the hall.

Billy tried this, and to his joy it was not fastened except with a button inside.

Blowing out the light he opened the window, and in a moment more was outside in the hall.

His first duty then was to rescue the girl.

Moving silently forward, feeling as he advanced, he soon found a door and, much to his satisfaction, found the key in the lock.

Unlocking it, he advanced into the room, and then paused and lighted a match.

This room, much to his surprise, was furnished. It was evidently Abner Hawk's room. And the girl was lying on the bed, bound and gagged.

"Sweet pertaters! Polly, how in th' world did ye ever git inter this state o' fix?" Billy exclaimed. "Don't ye make any noise now," he added, "an' I'll have ye out o' here in no time."

Having looked around, he blew out the match, and then advanced to the bed and removed the gag from the girl's mouth.

"Now ye kin talk," he whispered, "but don't talk too loud."

"Who are you?" Maud asked.

"Me? Why, I'm Billy! Don't ye know me? I— Oh! I see! you're Miss Elmore."

"Yes, that is my name."

"I took ye ter be Polly Osmond ag'in, same's I did t'o her day when that spider-legged dude o' yours knocked me down. Well, it's all th' same. I'm here ter git ye out, an' I'm goin' ter do it. Where be ye tied?"

"Heaven bless you!" Maud cried. "Get me out if you can, and you shall be rewarded. My hands and feet are tied."

"Oh! I'll git ye out if it's in th' wood." Billy declared earnestly, and he set to work at once to free her hands and feet.

In a short time the task was accomplished.

"The el!" he exclaimed in a whisper. "now ye're free, an' we'll proceed ter git out o' here post haste. I've had all I want o' this house."

"Why, have you been imprisoned here, too?"

"Hare! Well, I should chirp! I've been here thirty hours or more, an' hadn't brains enough ter git out."

"And how did you escape?"

"Well, truth is, miss, we hain't out o' th' woods yet; but th' way I got my hands loose was ter hold 'em over th' candle an' burn 'em loose. It hurt, you bet! an' it took skin an' all; but I was bound ter git loose ef it took a leg. Come, though, we must mosey. You put yer hands onto my shoulders an' foller me as close an' as still as ye kin. There, that's it; now, forward—march."

In this manner they left the room and descended the stairs.

Barely had they reached the bottom, though, when they heard heavy steps in the other end of the hall.

All was darkness, and Billy drew Maud back close to the wall, and cautioned her to be perfectly still. In stepping back, the boy felt that there was an open door just behind him, and as the steps approached, he stepped further back and drew Maud with him into the room.

At the same moment another door was heard to open, and the men, whoever they were, entered an adjoining room.

Billy's great fear was that they were in the same room; but these fears were quickly dispelled. One of the men struck a light, and its rays fell into Billy's room through a broken place in the wall.

Billy stepped silently to the place where the wall was down, and looked through.

What he saw surprised him not a little.

There were Abner Hawk, his partner, Bill, and another evil-looking man, and with them was—Maurice Melvin.

CHAPTER XVII.

BILLY'S BOODLE SAFE.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy almost cried out, "here's a p'izen diffikil'ty, an' no mistake. There's some sort o' dark biz goin' on, sure's guns. Lordy! but I'll git my work in on that spider-legged dude yet. Here's jist th' chance ter let Miss Elmore onto his true character, too. Must let her see what a nice feller he is."

Stepping back to Maud, he asked:

"Say, miss, kin ye keep still if I show ye a s'prise?"

"Yes," the girl whispered. "But let us hasten out of here."

"All right, in jist two minutes. Want ye ter take a look through that hole fu'st. Mind ye don't make a sound, fer if ye do, we're gone, sure pop."

"I will be silent."

Billy pressed her arm to caution her to be silent.
"So, boss," Hawk was saying, "you've made up your mind to do it, eh?"

"Heavens! I'm forced to do it!" young Melvin exclaimed. "My account is something like thirty thousand dollars short, and there is no other way. The girl I meant to marry has suddenly become a fool, a jabbering idiot, and of course that game is blocked. If I could have got my fingers into the Elmore fun's. I could have saved myself."

"Even if you did have to commit bigamy to do it," Hawk put in.

"I cared nothing for that. I would have married her if I'd had a dozen wives."

"Well, what's yer plan?" one of the other men asked.

"I will tell you. I have left the — Bank so that it can be broken into with ease. I want you to rob it. You will get at least three hundred thousand dollars cash, if you follow my directions. Out of that you must give me fifty thousand. The rest you are to divide among yourselves. Will you do it?"

"Will we?" cried the three; "will ducks swim?"

Broadway Billy felt Miss Elmore trembling so that he feared she would fall, and he put his arm around her for support.

"Don't weaken, miss," he whispered. "Jest wait a minute more till I get onto this little plot, an' then we'll try ter get out."

In a short time Billy had the whole plot.

At two o'clock these four men intended to break into and rob the bank of which Maurice Melvin was cashier.

"Come now, miss," the boy then whispered, "an' we'll see what's ter be did."

Silently they moved toward the door, out into the hall, and then Billy began to feel around for a door in the rear—or front, whichever it was—of the house.

He knew he could not escape to Centre street through the saloon with Maud with him.

He found a door, and after some effort he managed to get it open.

Stepping out they closed the door after them, and then descended into what seemed to be a miserable yard.

Just ahead of them they saw a light.

Guided by this, Billy led the way as well as he could, and presently they came to the window of the house from which the light shone.

This house was on Mott street, and the light proved to be in a Chinese laundry.

Billy soon found a door, and gently pushed it open. It proved to be the rear door of a hall.

Into this hall they passed, and in a moment more were safely out upon Mott street.

"Thank th' good Lord we're out o' there," Billy exclaimed earnestly. "An' now, miss," he added, "I'm goin' ter take ye ter my home, where ye kin stay with my mother till mornin', an' then I'll take ye ter yer own home."

"No-no! I must go home at once!" the girl cried.

"Can't be done!" Billy exclaimed. "You'll have to follow my lead, an' I'm goin' straight home. Don't you feel uneasy, fer my mother is one o' th' best o' women, even if she is a little upset since th' fire."

Maud wanted to go home, but she was wholly dependent upon Billy, and had to do as he said.

So Billy took her to his new home.

"Who's there?" his mother called, when he knocked at her door.

"It's me, Billy," the boy answered. "Open th' door, mom, quick. I've got a lodger fer ye who'll have ter stay here till mornin'."

"Why, Polly!" Mrs. Weston cried, when she opened the door, and she caught Maud in her arms at once.

"Tain't Polly, though," said Billy. And then he explained the situation.

Mrs. Weston was greatly surprised, and assured Maud that she would take the best of care of her till morning. And Billy, leaving his mother to tell her all about Polly Osmond, set out again to do further good work.

He went at once to the nearest police station.

There he told the officer in charge all about the intended robbery, and gave him all the details he had overheard.

The officer at once detailed five men to take charge of the affair, and they set out for the bank immediately, and Billy with them.

When they arrived there they knocked loudly at the door, and they hurriedly explained the situation to the two watchmen, who promptly admitted them.

It was now almost one o'clock.

Two of the officers were stationed in a room under the main floor, where the traitor cashier had arranged an easy means of entrance.

These two were to stand guard and cut off the retreat of the rascals.

The others posted themselves in the room where stood the safe which, from Billy's understanding of the scheme, was the one upon which evil designs were intended.

The watchmen sat down to a game of checkers.

An hour pas-ed.

Finally, a little after two o'clock, the policemen in the lower room heard a noise at a small door, and a moment later four masked men fled into the room.

The one who led the way was a slim man with very thin legs.

This was the cashier.

Instead of using force upon the safe, the other men had prevailed upon Melvin to accompany them into the building and open it for them, after which they would damage it enough to give the impression that it had been forced.

As silently as shadows the four crept up to the room above, where, with drawn revolvers, they came

suddenly upon the two watchmen and ordered them to throw up their hands.

The watchmen obeyed, and were quickly and securely bound and gagged.

This took place in a room that was not visible from the street.

The watchmen being secured, one of the burglars stood guard over them while the others turned their attention to the safe.

As soon as they were off their guard the policemen stepped forth.

"Hands up! you rascals!" they cried, "or we'll drop you in your tracks."

The four villains were paralyzed.

"Trapped!" cried Hawk, and he made a dash for the door and down the stairs.

The next moment a voice below cried "halt!" and then all realized how cleverly they had been duped.

But, how had their secret got out? They could not imagine, for Broadway Billy had not yet shown himself.

"Hands up!" the officers ordered again, and the rascals obeyed.

Then one of the policemen tore the masks from their faces, and at the same time the others brought Hawk back to the room.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" crowed Broadway Billy, then, as he sprung out in sight and waved his hat.

"Sweet pertaters! Hawkey, old rocks how d'ye like it? Hello! dude, you too, eh? I told ye I meant ter keep my eye onter my boodle, an' you bet I did! I seen signs o' Canada in your eyes th' first time I sighted ye. Canada is a handy place To-ron-to, and it Can-ad-a-boodler amazin'y when he gits thar; but you didn't start soon enough. Please don't faint; I didn't mean ter fire a double-barreled chestnut, but it would slip out. Ha, ha, ha! Oh! but this does me good! Say, dude, want ter knock me down ag'in? Has another stick o' timber hit ye, Hawkey? Oh! th' feller that gits up in th' mornin' ahead o' Broadway Billy has got ter stay up all night, I tell ye! Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

"How did you escape?" demanded Hawk, filled with curiosity to know.

"Ha, ha, ha!" the boy laughed, "wouldn't ye like ter know! I got out, an' that's all that's necessary. I guess if you'd really known what a rip-snortin' terror I am, when I git my war-paint on, ye'd 'a' let me alone. I got th' gal out, too, an'—Oh! ye needn't look so s'prised, fer ye might 'a' known I'd do it. An' that gal wasn't Polly, either, but Miss Maud Elmore."

"What!" cried Melvin, and he glared at Hawk, "you told me the girl you had was a common girl of the down-town streets."

"That's where he made his mistake," cried Billy.

"Th' gal he thought he had is th' one you seen day before yesterday at th' Elmore ranch. This one is Miss Elmore, an' she's no more crazy nor you be. Oh! but we did wax it to ye, didn't we! I was there an' seen it all."

Further conversation was interrupted by the officers, who having handcuffed their prisoners and released the watchman, set out to take the rascals to the lock-up.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MYSTERY CLEARED.

At an early hour next morning Broadway Billy set out to take Miss Maud Elmore to her home.

When they reached the house Billy rang the bell, and presently the door was opened by the old darky whom Billy had encountered once before.

"Fo' de Lawd!" the old man gasped, as his eyes fell upon Maud.

"What is the matter?" Maud asked, with a smile, thinking he was surprised at her appearance.

"Here's somethin' kin startle a shadder, anyhow," Billy muttered.

"Why, missy, whar yo' been?" the old darky asked. "I didn't know you was out ob de house."

This caused Maud to look surprised.

"You did not know I was out!" she exclaimed.

"No, for I see'd you in your room a minute ago."

Billy saw how it was, as of course the reader does, and said:

"There's a mystery here, miss, but it'll be all clear as soon as ye go up to yer room. Come on, fer there's somebody there fer ye ter see."

Billy was anxious for the two girls to meet.

"Some one in my room?" Maud questioned.

"What do you know about my room?"

"Oh! I've been there afore ter-day," Billy answered, and then to cut the matter short he started up-stairs.

Maud followed him, filled with curiosity.

When they arrived at the right door, Billy knocked, and the door was opened by the maid.

"Her, she is, safe an' sound!" Billy cried. "I told ye I'd bring her back!"

"On! it is Miss Elmore!" the maid exclaimed, and quickly she caught her young mistress in her arms.

Polly had arisen from her chair, and as soon as the maid released Maud, the eyes of the two young girls met.

Imagine, if you can, their surprise—their thoughts. In looking at the other, each girl beheld herself. It was like looking into a mirror, for they had changed places literally, and each was wearing the clothes of the other.

Maud was the first to speak.

"You are the girl for whom I have been mis-taken," she remarked.

"Yes, and whose place I have been forced to usurp," Polly answered.

Explanations followed.

Meanwhile the maid went for Mr. and Mrs. Elmore, and when they came in they were at first puzzled to decide which was Maud.

Our now limited space forbids our repeating all that was said, so we must leave it to the reader's imagination. Of one thing be sure, Broadway Billy's tongue was not idle.

He, Maud and Polly told their stories in full.

Presently there came a knock at the door. It proved to be the fat doctor. He was admitted, and the moment he saw the two girls he exclaimed:

"Bless me! what means this?"

He was told, and never a doctor felt so cheap. He took it good naturally, though, and insisted that the mistake was no discredit to his skill. The others did not express an opinion.

Another knock soon came. This time it proved to be the detective, swinging his eye-glasses, and with him was a woman—none other than Mrs. Osmond.

With a cry of joy Polly sprung at once to her arms, exclaiming—"Mother!"

The detective looked around in surprise, and his surprise did not lessen when his eyes fell upon Broadway Billy.

"Hello!" Billy exclaimed, "is that you? Kin I give ye any more p'ints? I see you're comin', seein' as ye've found Mrs. Osmond, but ye're too late. I told ye I was goin' inter this case, old hoss, an' here I be. Ye see I've found Miss Elmore an' brought her home, besides bein' th' means o' saving a bank from being robbed. Oh! I've got here, jest as I said I would."

The detective looked blue.

"But, my lad," he said, "have you solved the mystery? Do you know who is at the bottom of it all?"

"Say," was Billy's retort, "mebby you kin remember my axin' you a civil question t'other day on Broadway. It wouldn't be business-like fer me ter answer your questions."

Billy had got in a shot just where he wanted it.

"Oh! well," the detective remarked, "I shall soon learn it all, now that I am on the track."

"Hope ye do," said Billy, "that's what I had ter do."

When the excitement abated a little Mr. Elmore took the case in hand, and asked questions freely all around. And he soon brought out all that is known to the reader. Then he and the detective called at the house where Maud had been held prisoner. Then the whole secret came out.

In that house lived a Mrs. Bloom. In former years she had been a Miss Rich, a society belle. She had loved St. John Elmore, and when he married her rival, a Miss Davids, she vowed to have revenge. Mrs. St. John Elmore's first and only children were twins—girls. When they were one year old Miss Rich stole one of them and hired Mrs. Osmond to keep it. This nearly killed Mrs. Elmore, and in one year her hair turned white from grief. Miss Rich afterward married a Mr. Bloom. He was now dead. The woman's idea was, to let one of the twins be reared in luxury and become educated, while the other, living in poverty, would grow up ignorant. Then when they grew up she intended to change them.

How she succeeded has been shown. The negress who assisted her was one of her tools whom she had managed to get into the Elmore house. And to her was due the burning of the old tenement, she having hired Abner Hawk to set it on fire. This was done so that all trace of Mrs. Osmond might be lost.

The woman made a full confession, and it was afterward decided by competent medical authority that she was partly insane. Indeed, a short time later she was confined in an asylum.

Thus the strange resemblance between Polly Osmond and Maud Elmore was accounted for. They were twin sisters. Mrs. Osmond's corroborating of Mrs. Bloom's story proved that, even had further proof been wanting. And Polly, whose true name was Meta Elmore, was welcomed home.

Mrs. Osmond, whom "Polly" declared had always been good to her, was given a home in the house-hold.

Maurice Melvin was handled without gloves, and the law touched him not lightly. Maud Elmore, out of pity, found his wife and child and provided for them.

Abner Hawk, too, received his just deserts, as did his comrades in crime.

Broadway Billy was rewarded, of course. Mr. Jonas Herman placed two hundred dollars to his account at once, and Mr. Elmore added five hundred more, which made the sum total fifteen hundred dollars, which Billy called a "respectable boodle."

Maud Elmore and Meta grew to love each other at once, and they both welcome Billy to the Elmore residence whenever he calls. Billy says he shall hold "Polly" strictly to her bargain, of which mention has been made, but she tells him he must first give up the street and attend to his education. Their agreement was—that Polly was to become his sweetheart as soon as he became old enough to have one.

But Billy still sticks to the street, though he has promised to attend night-school and study hard. He and his partner, "Skinny," are working hard and saving their money toward buying a corner stand they still have in view. Billy's aim and end in life is to become a self-made man.

"That boodle o' mine," he declares, "will keep, an' if I git tooken off in my youth an' beauty by th' pesky measles, or somethin' else, it'll be handy fer my mom ter draw on in her old age. What I'm aimin' fer is ter become a self-made man o' wealth. Soon's me an' Skinny gits started in biz I intend ter branch out inter th' detective field, an' then you bet I'll make myself known ter Inspector Br—Hello! here's a job. Shine, sir? Shine? I'll shine 'em up so slick ye'll think they're patent leather. Shine?"</

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